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WYLLARD'S WEIRD

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"ISHMAEL,"

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL
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WYLLARD'S WEIRD

CHAPTER I.

WEDDING GARMENTS.

HILDA'S presence at Penmorval was full of comfort and solace for Dora Wyllard. She had known Hilda all her life, had seen her grow from childhood to womanhood, had loved her with a sisterly love, trusting her as she trusted no one else. Hilda had been only a child at the time of Dora's engagement to Edward Heathcote; yet, even at eleven years of age, Hilda's tender heart had been full of sympathy for her brother when that engagement was broken off, and when Dora became the wife of another man. She had been angry, with vehement, childish anger. That Dora should like any man better than him who, in the fond eyes of the younger sister, seemed the prince and pattern of fine gentlemen, was an unpardonable offence.

Hilda at eleven was precocious in her knowledge of books, and very self-opinionated in her judgment of people. She told her brother she would never speak to Dora again, that she would run a mile to avoid even seeing her: and then, a few months after Dora's marriage, finding that her brother had forgiven that great wrong with all his heart, Hilda melted one day suddenly, at meeting Mrs. Wyllard on the moor, and fell into her old friend's arms.

"I have tried to hate you for being so wicked to my brother," she sobbed, as Dora bent over her and kissed her.

"Your brother forgave me ever so long ago, Hilda," said Dora. "Why should you be less generous than he?"

"Because I love him better than he loves himself," cried Hilda, in her vehement way; "because I know his value better than he does. O Dora, how could you like any one else better than Edward?"

"You must not ask me that, my darling. Those things cannot be explained. Fate willed it so."

"And I suppose you are very happy in your grand house?" said Hilda sullenly.

"I am very happy with the husband I love, Hilda. The grand house makes no difference. And now we are going to be good friends, aren't we, dear? and we are never going to talk of the past. How you have grown, Hilda!"

"Out of all my frocks," answered Hilda, glancing contemptuously at her ankles. "It is perfectly degrading never to have a frock long enough for one —and never to have one's waist in the right place. The dressmaker says I have no waist yet. Dressmakers are so insulting to girls of my age. I think I shall positively trample upon my dressmaker when I am grown up, to revenge myself for all I have suffered from the tribe."

"My Hilda, what an old-fashioned puss you have grown!"

"How can I help being old-fashioned? I never see any young people. Edward never comes to The Spaniards now. You have driven him away."

"Hilda, if we are to be friends—"

"Well, I won't say it again; but you have, you

know. It is awfully dull at home. I suppose I may say that?"

"I hear you have a new governess. I hope you like her?"

"You needn't hope that, for you know girls never do. She is a poor sheep of a thing, and I don't suppose I hate her quite so much as some girls hate their governesses. But she is dreadfully dreary. She makes her own gowns; and of an evening her needle goes stitch, stitch, stitch, in time to the ticking of the clock, while I practise my scales. I don't know which I hate most, the clock, or the piano, or the needle."

"Poor Hilda, you must spend half your time with me in future. I shall call to-morrow, and ask your father's permission to have you at Penmorval as often as I like."

"He won't refuse, if there's any consistency in him," replied Hilda, "for he is always grumbling about the noise I make, and about my sliding down the banisters. How did *he* go down-stairs I wonder, at my age? Those broad banisters at The Spaniards must have been made for sliding. But fathers are

so inconsistent," concluded Hilda. "I shouldn't wonder if he wouldn't rather have me and my noise at home than allow me to be happy at Penmorval."

"Let us hope that he will be reasonable," said Dora, smiling, "even though he is a father."

Mrs. Wyllard called at The Spaniards next day, and was not too graciously received by Mr. Heathcote—old Squire Heathcote, as he was called in that part of the world. He was a testy invalid, a sufferer from some chronic complaint which was so obscure in its complications as to seem only an excuse for ill-temper, and he had not forgiven Dora for jilting his son. He softened gradually, however, melted by the sweetness of her manner, and by memories of days that were gone, when he had admired her mother, and had been ruthlessly cut out by her father. The eyes that looked at him seemed to be the eyes that he had loved in his youth.

"If you care to be troubled with the girl, I ought to be grateful for any kindness you may show her," said the Squire. "She makes more noise than a regiment, and she is always disobeying her gover-

ness, or neglecting her lessons; and then I am called upon to interfere. I wouldn't mind if they would fight it out between them, and leave me in peace."

"You shall be left in peace very often, if you will allow me to have Hilda for my little companion at Penmorval," said Dora. "And I promise you that her education shall not be altogether neglected while she is with me."

"If you can teach her manners, I shall be eternally your debtor," said the Squire. "I would much rather a young woman should know how to behave herself in society than that she should be able to read Æschylus or take a degree in mathematics."

Thus it came about that Hilda spent a great deal of her life at Penmorval, where the sheep-like governess escorted her, or whence she fetched her with unfailing patience, grateful exceedingly when she was rewarded with a cup of tea in Mrs. Wyllard's pretty drawing-room, or in the yew-tree arbour.

And thus in the seven happy years of Dora Wyllard's married life—her apprenticeship, as she

had called it playfully last June, when the anniversary of her marriage came round—Hilda had been her chief companion. The girl had grown up at the young matron's side as a younger sister, and had been a link between Dora and Edward, albeit these two saw each other but seldom, for Edward's home had been in the neighbourhood of Plymouth until within the last two years.

The old Squire did not long survive that interview in which he complained of his young daughter's hoydenish manners. He did not live to see the hoyden soften into a graceful, modest girl, reserved and silent among strangers, full of vivacity among those she loved. His elder son succeeded him in the possession of The Spaniards, a bachelor, and an enthusiastic sportsman. He was one of those ideal brothers with whom a sister can do just what she likes; and under his *régime* Hilda learnt to ride to hounds, and contrived to enjoy herself as much as any girl in Cornwall. She mourned him passionately when he was snatched away in the flower of his manhood, victim to a cold caught during a fishing tour in Connemara.

Edward's rule was almost as kind, but not quite so easy. He had narrower ideas about the rights of young ladies, especially in relation to the hunting-field.

"When I hunt you can go with me," he said, "but I will not have you flourishing about the country with no one but a groom to look after you;" and this narrower rule deprived Hilda of many a day's sport. Courtenay, the elder brother, had never missed a day with fox-hounds or harriers, and he had allowed his sister the run of his stables, and much latitude in all things.

While Hilda was growing up under Dora Wyllard's wing, while Edward Heathcote changed from bachelor to married man, and then to widower, Bothwell Grahame was serving his Queen and his country in the far East. He could just remember having seen Hilda now and again as a child. He came back to Cornwall to find her a woman, or a girl on the verge of womanhood; and it was not long before he grew to believe in her as the very perfection of girlhood and womanhood in one—girl-

hood when she was gay, and in her more serious moods altogether womanly.

In these darker days, under that heavy cloud which had fallen upon Dora Wyllard's life, Hilda's presence was an inestimable blessing. Dora was able to put aside the thought of her own great sorrow every now and then, while she entered with all her heart into the life of her young friend—this fresh young life, so full of hope in the future, of earnest purpose and sweet humility. If a king had stooped from his throne to woo her, Hilda could not have been prouder of her royal lover than she was of Bothwell. She spoke of him as of one who honoured her by his affection, and she seemed full of fearfulness lest she should not be good enough for her hero. It never occurred to her that it was Bothwell who ought to be thankful, that it was he who had won the prize.

There was a sweet self-abnegation in this girlish love which touched Dora deeply, she being all unconscious of her unselfish worship of her husband, her own surrender to the lover who stole her from her betrothed.

Hilda was very fearful of intruding her new joys and hopes upon her friend's sorrow.

"I ought not to chatter about our prospects, Dora, when you are so weighed down with care," she said apologetically.

But Dora insisted upon hearing all about the new home which was to be made out of the old cottage. She insisted upon discussing the trousseau and the linen-closet, glass and china, and even hardware; albeit her own lines had fallen in a mansion where all these things were provided on a lavish scale, and left to the care of a housekeeper, to be destroyed and renewed periodically, for the benefit of old-established tradesmen.

"You never had a linen-closet to look after, Dora," said Hilda, pitying her friend. "That is the worst of being so rich. There is no individuality in your home-life. I mean to be a regular Dutch housewife, and to keep count of every table-cloth in my stock. I shall make and mark and mend all the house-linen; and I shall be much prouder of my linen-closet than of my gowns and bonnets. And the china-closet, Dora, ought not

that to be lovely? One can get such delicious glass and china nowadays for so little money. I have looked at the Plymouth china-shops, and longed to buy the things, before I was engaged; and now I can buy all the glass and china for our house—I have saved enough money out of my allowance to pay for all we want in that way."

"What an independent young person you are, Hilda!" said her friend, laughing at her; "but you must not spend all your money on cups and saucers—"

"And teapots!" interjected Hilda—"such sweet little china teapots. I will have one for every day in the week."

"Teapots are all very well; but you will have your trousseau to buy. You must keep some of your money for frocks."

"I have no end of frocks; more than enough," protested Hilda. "I shall buy just two new gowns—my wedding-gown, and a tailor gown for riding outside coaches in the honeymoon. Bothwell proposes that we should go round the south coast as far as the Start, and then across country to Hartland,

and home by Bude. That is to be our honeymoon tour."

"Very nice, and very inexpensive, dearest. And then you are to come here to live till your new home is ready?"

"I am afraid we shall be very much in your way."

"You will be a comfort to me, Hilda; both you and Bothwell will be a help and comfort to me."

Hilda spent her evenings for the most part in the invalid's room. Her sympathetic nature made it easy for her to adapt herself to the necessities of a sick-room. She could be very quiet, and yet she could be bright and gay. She could be cheerful without being noisy. She sang with exquisite taste, and sang the songs which are delightful to all hearers—songs that appeal to the heart and soothe the senses.

Julian Wyllard was particularly fond of her German ballads—Schubert, Mendelssohn, Jensen, old Volks-Lieder; but once when she began a little French song, "Si tu savais," he stopped her with a painful motion of his distorted hand.

"Not that, Hilda. I detest that song;" and for the first time Hilda doubted the excellence of his judgment.

"I wonder you dislike it," she began.

"O, the thing is pretty enough; but it has been so vulgarised. All the organs were grinding it when I lived in Paris."

"And those organs disturbed you at your work sometimes, perhaps," said Dora, seated in her accustomed place beside his pillow, ready to adjust his reading-lamp, to give him a new book, or to discuss any passage he showed her. He read immensely in those long hours of enforced captivity, but his reading had been chiefly on one particular line. He was reading the metaphysicians, from Plato and Aristotle to Schopenhauer and Hartmann; trying to find comfort for the anguish of his own individual position in the universal despondency of modern metaphysics.

"A man chained to a sick-bed ought to be able to console himself with the notion that the great world around him is only an idea of his own brain; and yet even when convinced of the unreality of

all things, there remains this one central point in the universe, the sense of personal pain. Such a belief might reconcile the sufferer to the idea of suicide, but hardly to the idea of existence. Ah, my Dora, if you are only a phantasm, you are the sweetest ghost that ever a man's brain invented to haunt and bless his life."

"Don't you think you might read more interesting books while you are ill, Julian?" suggested his wife.

"No, dear. These books are best, for they set me thinking upon abstract questions, and hinder me from brooding upon my own misery."

What could Dora say to him by way of comfort, knowing too well that this misery of his was without hope on earth; knowing that this burden of pain which had fallen upon him must be carried to the very end; that day by day and hour by hour the gradual progress of decay must go on; no pause, no respite; decay so slow as to be almost imperceptible, save on looking back at what had been?

"Thank God the brain is untouched," said Julian Wyllard, when his wife pitied him in his

hours of suffering. "I should not have cared to sink into imbecility, to have only a dull vague sense of my own identity, like a vegetable in pain. I am thankful that Spencer assures me the brain is sound, and is likely to outlast this crippled frame."

Bothwell rode over on Sunday morning as he had threatened, and appeared at the parish church with his cousin and Hilda, much to the astonishment of some of the parishioners who had suspected and almost condemned him. They were now veering round, and had begun to inform each other that Mr. Grahame had been a much-wronged man, and that there was evidently a great deal more in the mystery of the strange girl's death than any one in Bodmin had yet been able to fathom. No doubt Mr. Distin, the famous criminal lawyer; knew all about it, and his cross-examination of Bothwell Grahame had been only a blind to throw the press and the public off the right scent. The very fact of his coming all the way from London to attend a Cornish inquest argued an occult knowledge, a shadow behind the throne. Some among Bothwell's late detractors

hinted that the business involved a personage of very high rank, and were disposed to transfer their suspicions to a local peer, who was not so popular as he might have been, having but recently refused to remit more than one-third of his farmers' rents, or to renew leases at less than half the previous rental, while he was known to have narrow views about ground game.

And now Bodmin beheld Bothwell Grahame seated in the Penmorval pew between his cousin and Hilda Heathcote, and Bodmin opined that his engagement to Miss Heathcote must be a settled thing, since it was known that he had taken a house at Trevena, and was building and improving there on a large scale. There were some who approved, and some who condemned; some who wondered that Squire Heathcote could allow his only sister to marry such a reprobate, others who declared that Bothwell was a high-spirited fellow, who had been a fine soldier, and would make a capital army-coach; but these differences of opinion helped to sustain conversation, which sometimes sank to a very low ebb in Bodmin for lack of matter.

It was a lovely autumn day, and Bothwell strolled in the rose-garden with his sweetheart, between luncheon and five-o'clock tea, talking over their house and their future.

"And now, dearest, there is only one point to settle," said Bothwell, when they had discussed furniture and china and glass to their hearts' content, and when Bothwell had given a graphic description of sundry Chippendale chairs and Early-English bureaux which he had discovered and bargained for in cottages and farmhouses within twenty miles of Trevena. "I had a little talk with Wyllard before luncheon. He is most cordially disposed towards us; and he wants to hurry on our marriage in order that he may be present at the ceremony. He feels just able to go down to the church in a Bath-chair. His chair could be wheeled up the aisle, and placed within sight and sound of the altar, without being in anybody's way. He says if we delay our marriage he may no longer have the power to do even this much; and for this reason he is urgent that we should marry almost immediately. What do you say, dearest? Will you take up your burden as a

poor man's wife? Will you be mine soon; at once almost? The week after next, for instance."

"O Bothwell!"

"Think, dear love, there is nothing to delay our marriage, except want of faith in each other, or in ourselves. If you have any doubt of me, Hilda, or any doubt as to your own love for me—"

"I have none, Bothwell—not a shadow of doubt."

"Then let us be married on Tuesday week. That is the day Dora suggested. She tells me that you are the most sensible girl she ever met with, and that you are not going to buy a wagon-load of clothes in order to overdress your part in that old, old play called *Love in a Cottage:* so you see there is nothing to wait for."

"But I must have a wedding-gown, Bothwell, and a gown for travelling."

"Then you have just a week in which to get them made, dear. Not an hour more."

There was some further discussion; but in the end Hilda yielded to her lover's pleading. It should be any day he liked—it should be Tuesday. The

two gowns should be ordered next morning. Edward Heathcote had given Dora full powers, and he would doubtless hurry home at her bidding in time to arrange the terms of Hilda's marriage-settlement, and to be present at the wedding.

Bothwell was almost beside himself with gladness for the rest of the day; but good-feeling impelled him to restrain his exuberance, and to be grave and quiet in the presence of the patient sufferer, whose pale calm face told but little of mental struggle or bodily pain. The evening was spent in Julian Wyllard's room. There was a good deal of conversation, and Hilda sang some of her favourite songs; a sacred song of Gounod's, "There is a green hill far away," which Dora especially loved, and again, "Ave Maria," by the same composer. Bothwell sat in a corner by the pretty little cottage piano, listening to the rich full voice of his beloved, watching her slender fingers as they strayed over the keys, ineffably happy. He had no thought of evenings in the years that were gone, when he had listened to another singer, and watched other hands, delicate nervous fingers, glittering with dia-

monds. The voice of that old time was a thinner voice, a somewhat reedy soprano, and those tapering fingers had something of a bird's claws in their extreme attenuation; but he had thought the thin voice passing sweet in the days that were gone, and the hand of the siren had seemed to him a thing of beauty.

He left Penmorval soon after daybreak next morning, to ride back to Trevena. He was to return on the following Saturday to take up his abode there until the wedding-day; while Hilda was to go back to The Spaniards almost immediately, to collect her belongings, and make herself ready for her new life. All the business of furnishing could be done after the wedding, in that interval which the young couple were to spend at Penmorval.

Hilda was up in time to watch from her bedroom window while her lover rode away in the misty morning; but she was much too shy to go downstairs and wish him good-bye. She would have quailed before the awful eye of Stodden, the butler, had she ventured to show herself at such an unseemly hour, unchaperoned, unsanctioned by the

presence of a matron. So she hid behind the window-curtain, and watched her true knight's departure, and did not even fling him a flower by way of love-token.

When horse and rider were out of sight, Hilda went to her desk and wrote to her brother, urging him to come back without delay, explaining and apologising for the early date named for her wedding—reminding him as to her marriage-settlement that she wished Bothwell to profit as much as possible by her small independence—an altogether womanly letter, brimming over with love for her betrothed.

She went home that morning, and she and Fräulein Meyerstein began immediately to busy themselves with preparations for the wedding. It would naturally be the quietest of weddings, since Mr. Wyllard's condition forbade all festivity. Hilda said she would have the twins for her bridesmaids, and no others. They were to be dressed exactly alike, and all in pure white, like biscuit-china figures; they were to have little Pompadour frocks and petticoats and mob-caps. There was a tre-

mendous consultation that Monday afternoon with e chief dressmaker of Bodmin, a person of high reputation among those steady old-fashioned people who liked to spend their money in their own town, and who were naturally looked down upon by that other section of county society which had all its clothes from London or Paris. The dressmaker had made Hilda's frocks ever since she was a baby, and was inclined to be doleful at the idea of this trousseaux-less entrance into matrimony; but on being put upon her mettle she declared that the neat little white satin wedding-gown and the handy little olive cloth travelling-gown should be perfection after their kind; and then came a lengthy discussion about sleeves and velvet waistcoat, and the all-important question of buttons was treated exhaustively. Miss Pittman, the dressmaker, had been told of Doré and of Redfern, and had lain awake of a night thinking of their productions; she had been shown dresses from Swan & Edgar and from Lewis & Allenby; but she believed that for the hang of a skirt or the fit of a sleeve she could hold her own with any house in London. And then she favoured Hilda

and the Fräulein with a little lecture upon the righteous and the unrighteous manner of making and putting in a sleeve, which was eminently interesting from a technical point of view.

The first three days of that week seemed to Hilda to pass like a dream. She managed to maintain an outward aspect of supreme calmness; but her brain seemed to her in a whirl all the time. She went in and out of the house, and wandered about the gardens without knowing why; she went hither and thither, half her time hardly conscious where she was. She began one thing after another, and never finished anything. She was always waiting for Bothwell's letters, which came by every post, albeit a third person might have supposed that he could find very little to write about. For Hilda the letters were full of interest, and she made as much haste to answer them as if she and Bothwell had been heads of parties carrying on the business of the nation at a crisis. She was anxious to receive her brother's answer to her letter; but when it came, though satisfactory upon some points, the reply was not altogether agreeable.

"Mrs. Wyllard is quite justified in saying that I left the arrangement of your wedding in her hands," wrote Heathcote. "You could have no kinder friend or wiser counsellor, and to her decision, as to the date of your marriage, I bow. But I regret to say that I shall not be present at the ceremony. I have business which still detains me in Paris; and I have other reasons which hinder my being a witness of your wedding. You must not suppose that this decision on my part arises from any unfriendly feeling to Bothwell Grahame. I have reconciled myself to his marriage with you; and I shall do my uttermost in the future to prove myself his friend as well as yours. He will find that the instructions I have sent as to your settlement are framed with a due regard to his interests.

"There is one thing, however, in which I desire to alter Mrs. Wyllard's scheme, kind and hospitable as her idea is—namely with regard to your residence after your marriage. I cannot allow you to spend the first few months of your married life under Mr. Wyllard's roof, while your brother's house is more

than large enough to hold you and your husband. It is my wish, therefore, that Bothwell should bring you back to The Spaniards after your honeymoon, and that you and he should live there till your new home is ready for you. You will, in all probability, be very little troubled with my company, as I am likely to remain in Paris for some time to come; and you and Bothwell can ride my hunters and consider yourselves master and mistress of everything. I must beg that upon this question my wishes shall be regarded, and that you will carry out my plan, even at the hazard of offending Mrs. Wyllard, whom you know I esteem and respect above all other women.

"And now, my dear girl, I have nothing to do but to wish you all the blessings which a good and true-hearted woman deserves when she marries the man of her choice, and to request your acceptance of the enclosed cheque for your house and your trousseau.—Your very affectionate brother,

"EDWARD HEATHCOTE."

The cheque was for two hundred and fifty pounds;

but liberal as the gift was, it did not reconcile Hilda to the idea of her brother's absence on her wedding-day.

"It is extremely unkind of him not to come," she said, throwing the letter and enclosure into her desk. "And it is not kind of him to alter Dora's plans. I know she looked forward to having us at Penmorval. But I shall go and see her every day, poor darling."

This idea of her brother's absence on her wedding-day—that most fateful day in a woman's life—cast a shadow across the sunlight of Hilda's bliss. She could think of nothing else after the receipt of Heathcote's letter; and she was full of wonder as to his reasons for thus absenting himself upon an occasion when duty and good feeling both demanded his presence.

What could be his motive? she asked herself. He was not the kind of man to spare himself the trouble of crossing the Channel, even had it been necessary for him to return to Paris directly after the wedding. He had never spared himself trouble or shirked a duty. It was clear to her, therefore, that

he had some very strong motive for absenting himself from the marriage ceremony.

She could only imagine one reason for his conduct. She told herself that her brother, in his heart of hearts, still doubted Bothwell, and still disapproved of her marriage. He had allowed himself to be talked over by Mrs. Wyllard. The influence of that unforgotten love had prevailed over his own inclination. He had allowed his consent to be wrung from him; and now that it was too late to withdraw that consent he was not the less Bothwell's enemy. He could not bring himself to look on as an approving witness at a marriage which he regretted. He had told his sister that his discoveries in Paris had gone far to convince him of Bothwell's guiltlessness in relation to the French girl's death: but there was still something in the background, some prejudice yet undispelled, some doubt which darkened friendship.

It was the Wednesday before her wedding-day, and her preparations and arrangements had been for the most part made. There had been, indeed, but little

to do, since her return to The Spaniards as a bride would simplify matters, and give her ample time for packing her belongings—namely, those books and nicknacks which had beautified her own rooms; her jewels, chiefly an inheritance from her mother; and those few wedding presents which had arrived from the three or four intimate friends who had heard of her engagement. Among these gifts there was an immense satin-lined work-basket, from Fräulein Meyerstein—a basket provided with an orderly arrangement of tapes, buttons, cottons, and needles, such as a careful housewife must needs require in the repair of the family linen. The Fräulein had made a special journey to Plymouth in order to purchase and furnish this treasury of usefulness, and had brought it back in triumph.

"I cannot give you beautiful things," said the kind creature apologetically. "You have too many valuable jewels of your own to care for any trinket which I could offer; but in this basket you will find all which an industrious wife needs to preserve order and neatness in her household goods. There is flourishing thread of every quality to darn your

table linen. There are pearl buttons of every size for your husband's shirts; angolas of every shade for his socks; needles of every number; bobbins; scissors of every kind; and lastly, for remembrance of an old friend, there is this golden thimble, which I hope you will wear every day."

And with this little speech the Fräulein plumped her basket down in front of Hilda, and burst into tears, remembering how she, too, had once been engaged, and how adverse Fate had hindered her marriage.

"You are a dear kind soul," said Hilda, kissing her affectionately; "and I am sure you could not have given me anything I should have liked better. I shall think of you every day when I use this delightful basket. There is nothing like a useful gift for recalling an old friend."

Dora's present arrived the same day. A George II. tea-service, with two little caddies for black tea and green tea, holding about a quarter of a pound each. Hilda thought her silver teapot the sweetest thing that had ever been made, and she sat gazing at the service for an hour at a

stretch, and thinking how delightful it would be to make tea for Bothwell in the cosy winter dusk, when they two should be settled in their own house above the great Atlantic sea, the curtains drawn across their old-fashioned lattices, the wind raving over the hills, the waves roaring, and they two beside the domestic hearth, wrapped in a blessed calm—two hearts united and at rest.

She had been so happy yesterday in the thought of her future; and now to-day her brother's letter seemed to have changed the aspect of things. She was full of a vague disquietude—could not settle to any occupation, did not even care to take her usual walk across the hills to the Manor to inquire about Mr. Wyllard's health, and to spend an hour in confidential talk with Dora. To-day she sent a messenger instead, and sat all day in her own room brooding over Heathcote's letter. She felt unequal to facing the twins or the Fräulein, and pleaded a headache as a reason for not going down to luncheon; and indeed her troubled thoughts about that letter from Paris had given her a very real headache.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, when she heard a carriage drive up to the hall-door, and thought with horror that she would be summoned to receive callers. Her window commanded only an angle of the porch. She could just see a shabby-looking vehicle, which she knew could only be a fly from the station; and her heart began to beat violently as she thought that perhaps her brother had changed his mind, and had come home to do honour to her wedding.

No; it was no such pleasant surprise, only a strange lady who asked to see her. She had sent up her card:

"Lady Valeria Harborough."

"The lady will be greatly obliged if you will see her," said the servant. "She has come from Plymouth on purpose to see you."

"Of course I will see her," answered Hilda cheerfully. "You have shown her into the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Take in tea as soon as you can."

Hilda glanced at her glass before she left the room. Her plain cashmere gown was neat enough, and her hair was tolerably tidy, but her eyes had a heavy look, and she was very pale.

"I'm afraid I don't look a joyful bride, or do Bothwell credit in any way," she said to herself.

She had heard her lover speak once or twice of General Harborough as his kindest and most powerful friend in India. She had heard from Dora of the General's death, and that Bothwell had attended the funeral. And now she felt flattered exceedingly at the idea that the General's widow had taken the trouble to come to see her; no doubt from pure friendliness for her dead husband's *protégé*—deeming that there was no better compliment she could pay Mr. Grahame than to assume an interest in his betrothed. She, like Dora, took it for granted that old General Harborough's wife would be an elderly woman; and she went down to the drawing-room expecting to see a portly matron, gray-haired, bland, perhaps a little patronising in her double rank of Earl's daughter and General's widow. She was sur-

prised beyond all measure when a tall and slender figure rose to meet her, and she found herself face to face with a young woman whose brilliant eyes and interesting countenance were more striking than common-place beauty.

CHAPTER II.

LADY VALERIA FIGHTS HER OWN BATTLE.

The two women stood face to face in silence for a few moments. Surprise made Hilda dumb. She gazed in unconcealed wonderment at the small pale face framed in white crape, the delicate high-bred features, refined almost to attenuation, the luminous violet eyes with their long dark lashes, eyes which alone gave life and colour to the face.

Lady Valeria looked at the girl with so piercing a scrutiny that those brilliant eyes of hers seemed to burn into the face of her rival—a scathing look, measuring and appraising that modest girlish beauty, cheapening those innocent charms in scornful wonder.

And this was the woman for whose sake she, Valeria, had been flung away like an old glove—this girl-face, with its candid blue eyes and babified bloom, its broad white forehead ringed round with

infantile curls of golden brown, its delicately pencilled eyebrows, its coral lips, and small white teeth.

"For people who admire babies the girl is well enough," thought Lady Valeria.

Yet even her small knowledge of physiognomy taught her that the broad full forehead and the firmly-moulded lips meant force of character and firmness of purpose—that this girlish beauty was the beauty of a good and brave woman—that here there was no reed for her to twist and rend at her own passionate will, but a nature that was firmer and more concentrated than her own. Equal forces had met in these two—the force of passion and the force of principle.

"So you are Miss Heathcote," said the pale lips at last, after that silent interval, in which Hilda had heard the beating of her own heart; "you are the Miss Heathcote who is to marry Bothwell Grahame?"

"Yes, Lady Valeria. Bothwell has told me how kind a friend he had in General Harborough," returned Hilda calmly, trying to feel at her ease

under that searching gaze. "I am very much flattered that you should come to see me."

"I fear you will feel less flattered when you know the motive of my visit. No, thanks; I prefer to stand," she said curtly, as Hilda wheeled a chair towards her guest, and courteously invited her to be seated. "You will hate me, no doubt, when you know why I am here; and yet I am come to do you a service—perhaps the greatest service which one woman can render to another."

"What service, Lady Valeria?" asked Hilda, whose girlish bloom had been momently fading, and who was now almost as pale as her visitor.

"I am here to save you from a most unhappy union—from a fatal union—from marriage with a man who loves another woman!"

"That is not true," said Hilda very calmly. "Whoever your informant may have been, you have been misinformed. I am as firmly convinced of Bothwell Grahame's love, and of the worth of his character, as I am of my existence. I would as soon doubt one as doubt the other."

"You are like most girls of your age reared in

the country," said Lady Valeria, with quiet scorn. "You are very ignorant, and you are very vain. I suppose you imagine that you are the first woman Bothwell Grahame ever loved—that at seven-and-twenty he brings you a heart hitherto untouched by beauty; that his senses only awake from a lifelong torpor at sight of your exquisite charms; that nothing less than your exceptional loveliness could kindle that cold nature into flame."

"Lady Valeria, if you came here only to insult me—" began Hilda, moving towards the door.

"I came here to read you a lesson, to save you from a life of misery if I can; and you shall hear me," said Valeria passionately. "I am here for your sake, do you understand?—to save you and your lover from an irreparable folly. He would sacrifice his own happiness and a brilliant future, from a mistaken sense of honour to you. Now, I want you at least to know what manner of sacrifice he is going to make for you; and if you are not made of wood—if you have a woman's heart in your bosom—you will release him."

"Release him! What do you mean, Lady

Valeria? This is sheer madness. Mr. Grahame sought me of his own accord—chose me deliberately for his wife, in the face of great difficulties. We are both completely happy in our love for each other—our faith in each other. There never was a fairer prospect of a happy domestic life than that which smiles upon us. There is not a cloud, or the shadow of a cloud, between us."

A footman brought in a little bamboo table, and arranged the old-fashioned silver tea-tray; and during this brief interruption hostilities were suspended, and both women composed their faces to placid neutrality. Lady Valeria declined Hilda's cup of tea, proffered with a tremulous hand; and directly the man had gone, she coldly pursued her interrogation.

"Answer me one question, Miss Heathcote. Do you believe yourself Mr. Grahame's first love?"

"No," faltered Hilda. "I know that there was some one else—that there was an entanglement from which Mr. Grahame released himself, honourably and completely, before I accepted him as my future husband. I made that condition when first

he asked me to be his wife. I waited until he could give me his assurance upon this point before I consented to marry him."

"O, then you did know that there was some one?" exclaimed Lady Valeria, with crushing scorn. "You did know that there was an entanglement—or, in plain words, you knew that you were stealing another woman's lover."

"Lady Valeria, you have no right to say such a thing."

"I have every right. Yes, you knew well enough what you were doing, in spite of your provincial bringing up. Every woman is wise in these matters. An entanglement, you say. Do you know, girl, that this entanglement, of which you speak so flippantly, was a passionate all-absorbing love—a love that had lasted three years, that had braved all consequences, that had laughed at danger—a love that burns in every line of these letters? Read them; read them, girl, and see what your 'entanglement' means."

She had opened her reticule, and had taken out a packet of letters while she was speaking. She flung the packet on to a table near Hilda.

"Read them, Miss Heathcote. I suppose you know Mr. Grahame's handwriting. I suppose he has written to you."

"I can see that they are in Bothwell's hand," said Hilda, looking down at the bundle of letters, as if they had been a nest of scorpions; "but I decline to read letters that are not addressed to me."

"You are afraid to read them?"

"I will take it upon trust that they are love-letters. May I ask if they were written to you—General Harborough's wife?"

The calm and measured accents, the steady gaze of those honest eyes, the resolute attitude, the small well-balanced head proudly erect, the nervous hands clasped firmly on the back of a chair by which the girl was standing, surprised Lady Valeria, and with a far from pleasant surprise. She had expected Hilda to be more easily crushed. She had expected to see a love-sick girl sobbing at her feet, ready to surrender her sweetheart at the first attack. And instead of girlish weakness, she found a woman prepared to do battle for her love.

"The letters are addressed to me. I should

much like you to read them, in order that you may understand the nature of Bothwell Grahame's 'entanglement'."

"I decline to read them. It is quite enough for me to know that he was in love with a married woman, and that she encouraged his love—she, the wife of a good and brave old man—she who, by the right of her noble birth, should have been prouder, truer, purer than women of meaner race. She stooped so low! I am sorry that you came here, Lady Valeria. I am sorry that we have ever met—very sorry that you have told me your secret."

"It is everybody's secret by this time. A woman in my position is surrounded by lynx-eyed friends, who read her inmost thoughts. Everybody knows that Bothwell Grahame loved me, and that I returned his love. To you this seems terrible, no doubt. Yet I can tell you that I was a true wife to my husband, as the world estimates truth, and that he died honouring me. You, with your provincial inexperience and your narrow mind, cannot imagine a love which, although unconquered, could remain pure—passionate, intense, devoted, but un-

stained by sin. Such a love I cherished for Bothwell Grahame, and he for me. We had promised each other that, whenever my release came—and in the course of nature it was not likely to be long deferred—our lives should be linked, our love should be blest. I lived on that hope, and to Bothwell, as those letters would tell you, that hope was no less dear than to me. Honour, right feeling, honesty, were all involved in the promise which bound Bothwell Grahame to me; and I never for an instant doubted that he would keep that promise, never doubted that he was mine till death. But in an evil hour he met you. He was under a cloud. He was maddened by the idea that his neighbours thought the most horrible things of him. You interposed with your girlish sympathy, your sentimental prettiness. You consoled, you encouraged him in his dark hour; and that impulsive nature was moved to a step which he has repented ever since. He committed himself by an avowal which left him no possibility of retreat; and to be true to you he has broken the most sacred promise that man ever made to woman."

"You released him from that promise, Lady Valeria."

"Never. Some hasty words passed between us on one occasion, and we parted in anger. But there was no question of a release from his solemn engagement to me."

"He told me that the lady he had once loved had released him," said Hilda, terribly crestfallen.

She could not believe that Lady Valeria Harborough would tell her a deliberate lie. She was convinced, in spite of herself. Bothwell had deceived her.

"I beg you to read those letters," urged Valeria. "If you do not read them, you may think just a little worse of me than I deserve. I do not pretend to be a good woman; but I want you to know that my attachment to Bothwell Grahame never degenerated into a low intrigue. You may hear the vilest things said of me, perhaps, by and by, when it is known that Mr. Grahame is not going to marry me."

Hilda looked at the letters. She knew that the reading of them would wring her heart; and yet

the temptation was too strong to be steadfastly resisted.

Slowly, reluctantly, almost as if under the influence of a mesmerist, Hilda's hand was extended to the packet of letters. She took it up, and looked at it for a few moments, still hesitating.

The letters were folded lengthwise, without their envelopes. Bothwell's bold large hand was easy enough to read, even at a glance. Without untying the packet Hilda could see the nature of those letters. "My dearest love," "My life," "My ever beloved." Such words as those scattered on the folded pages told the character of the correspondence.

She had known from the first, from his own lips, that he had cared for another woman, that he had been in some manner bound to that other woman—his future life so compromised that he must needs win his release from that tie before he could offer himself honourably to his new love. She had known this, and yet the sight of those impassioned phrases in the hand of her betrothed tortured her almost to madness. She flung the packet from her, flung it

at her rival's feet, as if it had been some loathsome reptile that had fastened on her hand.

"It is shameful, abominable!" she cried. "Such words as those written to another man's wife! I will read no more—not a line—not a syllable."

"But you shall read, or you shall hear," said Valeria, taking up the packet. "You shall know what kind of vows this man made to me, this man whom you are going to marry."

She drew out a letter haphazard, and thrust it into Hilda's hand—forced her to read by sheer strength of will, watching her with flashing eyes all the while.

Hilda read words of such passionate vehemence that it was difficult to believe that transient feelings could have inspired them—words which told of rapturous delight in a reciprocal love, and fondest hope of future union; words that made light of all things in earth and heaven as weighed against that all-absorbing love. She read of that scheme of the future in which the ultimate marriage of the lovers was counted on as a certainty.

And it was for her sake he had abandoned this

old dream—this plan of a life so long cherished. It was for her, an obscure, country-bred girl, who could bring him neither fame nor fortune, that he had surrendered all hope of calling this brilliant high-born woman his wife.

And now the hour had come when he might have claimed her, when, his years of servitude being over, he had but to wait the brief span society demands, before he faced the world with this woman by his side, the sharer of her social status, her ample means. Surely this would have been a happy fate for him, if there were any truth in these words of his, words which seemed to scorch Hilda's brain as she stood, silent, motionless, poring over them.

"You see," said Lady Valeria, after a long silence, "that once at least your lover loved me."

"I thought that once in such things meant for ever," answered Hilda, with a quiet sadness, as of one who speaks of the dead. "Yet the man who wrote this letter has talked and written of his love for me as tenderly, if not as passionately, as he has written here. Yes, I knew that he had cared for some one else, but not like this. I did not

think such a love as this could come twice in a lifetime."

"You are wiser than I expected to find you," said Valeria, with languid insolence. "No, child, men do not love like that twice in a lifetime. I had Bothwell Grahame's heart at its best—his constancy, his devotion—and he would have been true to me till the end of his life had it not been for that business of the murder, which made men look askance at him, and your childish pity, which touched his heart when it was sorest. He was caught in the toils of his own affectionate nature. His grateful heart, which always melted at the least kindness, betrayed him. And because he was sympathetic and grateful you thought he loved you; and now you stand between him and his first love. You are the only barrier to a marriage which would make Bothwell Grahame a rich man, and me the happiest of women."

"If you had heard him talk of our future, if you had seen him planning our home, you would hardly doubt that he meant to be happy with me, Lady Valeria," said Hilda.

"My child, I have seen your future home; I have heard what kind of a life Bothwell Grahame is to lead as your husband. He is to be a schoolmaster, cramming dull boys for impossible examinations; grinding mathematics and theoretical engineering all day long and every day, till his brain is weary; going over the same ground again and again like a horse in a mill. He is to be a nobody, a plodding bread-winner, living year after year in a God-forsaken village, far away from the great arena of life; ground down by the fathers and patronised by the mothers of his pupils. He is to cherish no higher ambition than to be able to pay the butcher and the baker, and to get himself a new coat before the old one is threadbare. *That* is the life to which your generous love would condemn him."

"We are not going to be quite such paupers as you imagine, Lady Valeria. I have a small income of my own, which will at least pay the baker; and I do not think Bothwell's rich cousin would see him in want of a coat."

"My dear Miss Heathcote, it is only a question of degree. Granted that Mr. Grahame is sure of

his breakfast and dinner, his existence as a private tutor will be none the less a life of exile from all that makes life worth living—from the world of art and letters, from the strife and the glory of politics, from the great world of distinguished men and women. As my husband he would have the ball at his feet. His fortune would be large enough to command an opening in any career he might choose for himself, his connections on my side of the house would be powerful enough to help him, and his talents would undoubtedly bring him to the front. In the House his career would be assured. With his knowledge of India and Indian war tactics, he would inevitably make his mark. There are hardly three men in the House of Commons who have any real knowledge of that vast Eastern world for which English politicians legislate. You see I have dreamed for him, thought for him. All my ambition is for him, and not for myself."

"I am willing to believe that you love him, Lady Valeria," said Hilda, with frigid distinctness, looking her rival full in the face, "since nothing but the blindest love could induce any woman in

your position to lower yourself as you have done—first in India as General Harborough's wife, and secondly to-day as General Harborough's widow—when you come to me and ask me to give up my betrothed husband, the man to whom I am to be married next Tuesday; for I suppose that is the gist of all you have said to me."

"I ask nothing from you, Miss Heathcote. I know the narrow view which most girls of your age, brought up as you have been, take of life and its obligations. I do not expect large-minded ideas from a young lady with your surroundings." This was said with infinite scorn of Hilda's rustic rearing. "But I think it well that you should know how much Bothwell Grahame surrenders for the privilege of having you for a wife. Of course it is quite possible that the recompense may be worth the sacrifice. It is for you to judge of that. I wish you good-day."

Hilda bowed and rang the bell, without a word. She did not accompany her visitor to the drawing-room door, but stood in a stony silence looking out at the window in front of her, with fixed eyes.

It was only when the outer door had closed on Lady Valeria that the girl flung herself on the nearest sofa and abandoned herself to her grief.

Alas, this entanglement of the past had been something more than a garland of roses. It had been a chain from which her lover had tried to release himself, but whose iron links yet hung about him.

All the happiness was gone out of her life, all the sweet tranquillity which had been the holiest charm in her love for Bothwell, the deep faith in her beloved, the assurance of his trustworthiness, his unalloyed love for her. How could she ever again believe in that love, after she had heard the history of his passion for another, after she had read of that wild infatuation in his own hand, after she had seen the woman he had thus loved and thus addressed—a woman to win and hold the love of men, a woman whose face had that subtle charm of supreme refinement and distinction which is far above the peach-bloom tints and perfect lines of stereotyped beauty? In Valeria the broken-hearted girl acknowledged a siren before whose fascinations

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the wisest man might be as a fool. She compared herself with her rival. She walked across the room and stood before the long console-glass, contemplating her own image, half-scornfully, half-sorrowfully. The pale tear-blotted face appeared at its worst, robbed of the freshness that constituted half its beauty. The slight and girlish figure looked insignificant as compared with Valeria's statelier bearing.

The girl turned herself about, and looked at herself at every angle, as if she had been trying on a gown at her milliner's.

"What a dowdy I am!" she said to herself. "Just the very pattern for a schoolmaster's wife. I doubt if Lady Valeria is more than an inch taller; and yet she looks a queen. It is the way she carries her head, I suppose, and the way she walks, like a woman accustomed to command. Yes, a man might well be proud of such a wife, and of the position such a wife could give him. Bothwell in Parliament. Bothwell a great authority on Indian affairs. How strange it sounds! But I know how clever he is, how well he can talk upon any subject. It would be a splendid career for him. And for my sake he

is to forego all that, and to drudge as a tutor in a Cornish village. Yes, I suppose it would be a dreary life for such a man—though it seemed so full of brightness when we two talked about it last week. For my sake. No, Bothwell," she said to herself resolutely, striking her clenched hand upon the marble table. "No, Bothwell, not for my sake! You shall not surrender fame and fortune for my sake!"

And then, seating herself on the old-fashioned window-seat, with clasped hands lying in her lap, and steadfast eyes brooding on the ground, in an attitude of deepest thought, she retraced the history of Bothwell's courtship. She asked herself if she had verily been, as Lady Valeria had insinuated, herself half the wooer. She remembered how, in the beginning of their acquaintance, she had admired Dora Wyllard's cousin—how his riding, his singing, his conversation had alike seemed perfection. How she had contrasted him, to his wondrous advantage, with the country squires around and about. It was just possible that in her girlish inexperience she had betrayed her admiration, had flattered Bothwell into

the idea that he liked her. And then, when the hour of trouble came, it was true that she had made no effort to hide her feelings; she had given Bothwell her sympathy almost unasked; she had, perhaps, lured him into declaring himself as her lover; when the feeling which inspired him was but the impulse of the moment, a transient emotion, born of gratitude.

She could understand how, in his self-contempt, his wounded honour, he had believed that his love for Valeria was a thing of the past, and had been glad to release himself from the ignoble bondage. But now that Valeria was free, his first love, fondly attached to him, valuing her fortune and position only as a means for his advancement, who could doubt that the old love would revive in his breast with all the old fervour; that his heart would go back to his first beloved, as a bird returns to its nest?

And was his whole life to be sacrificed because of this one mistaken impulse? No, the wrong was not yet irreparable. The marriage planned for next Tuesday need never take place.

Hilda began deliberately to scheme out the manner in which she should set her lover free. If the thing was to be done, it must be done bravely and thoroughly—not by halves. There must be no half-hearted action, no wavering, no pretence of surrender offered in the hope that Bothwell would refuse to accept his liberty. No; she must make the sacrifice as full and as effectual as that of Jephthah's daughter. She gave her life to save her father's honour. She (Hilda) could give her happiness, her fair future, the sweet ideal she had dreamed of, the life which to every good woman seems of all lives most perfect, an existence spent in tranquil seclusion with the husband of her choice.

After long brooding, deepest thought interrupted ever and anon by a burst of passionate weeping, tears which would not be restrained, Hilda had made her plan. She would go away, quite away, where Bothwell could not follow her. She would write him a letter which would leave him free to return to his old allegiance, while she herself would disappear, drop quietly out of the circle in which

she was known, and remain hidden from all her friends for the next few months, perhaps for a year: at any rate until the joy-bells had rung for Bothwell's marriage with his old love. Alas, those joy-bells! She had imagined them ringing for her own wedding; she had heard their sweet music in her dreams.

Where should she go? What should she do with herself during the time of hiding? That was the question; and it was a difficult one for this inexperienced girl to answer. She had travelled so little, that all the wide world outside her own home was no more familiar to her than a chapter of geography. She knew the names of mountains and rivers, she had made her dream-pictures of beautiful places and scenes in far-away lands; but of railways and steamers, of the mode and manner of journeying from one place to another, of hotels and custom-houses, and the exchange of money, she knew hardly anything.

"I must go very far away, to some place where he would not think of following me, where he could never find me," she said to herself, supposing that it would be a point of honour with Bothwell to

follow her, to keep his plighted troth, if it were possible.

She wanted to set him free, to make it easy for him to go back to his old love. She told herself that Lady Valeria had spoken the truth, and that it was not possible for him to have forgotten that old love.

When he had married Valeria, she, Hilda, would be free to come back to her home, to take up the thread of her broken life and follow it on to the dreary end. What joy could she have in her life, having lost him? Only the joy of knowing that she had loved him better than herself, cared more for his happiness than her own—the joy of woman's martyrdom.

After long deliberation, after having thought of a trip to Canada or a voyage to Australia, after having meditated upon various possible and impossible journeys, she decided upon a very commonplace course of proceeding. She had often heard it remarked of a levanting criminal that if he had stayed in London or any populous city, he would in all probability have escaped his pursuers; he would have

been lost in the press of humanity, like a bubble in a running stream; whereas the man who goes to America is almost inevitably traced and trapped.

She would not go to London, a city she hated, and where she might at any moment run against her Cornish friends, all of whom paid occasional visits to the metropolis. She would go to Paris, where she would be lost among strangers; where she could live quietly in some obscure quarter, improving herself as a singer and a pianiste, until her time of probation was over, and the announcement of Bothwell's marriage told her that her sacrifice had been consummated. She would so plan her life that her brother could know that she was well and well cared for; but even he should not know the place of her residence, lest he should betray her secret to Bothwell.

This idea of Paris was partly traceable to an old influence. Until a year ago she had taken lessons from a bright little Frenchwoman who had taught her music and singing, and who had helped her incidentally with her French. The lessons had been going on for three years, when Hilda was pro-

nounced to have finished her musical education, or at least to have learnt as much as Mademoiselle Duprez could teach her, and in those three years the little Frenchwoman had been a weekly visitor at The Spaniards, coming all the way from Plymouth to give her lesson, and being driven back to the station by her pupil, after a cheery luncheon, which the little woman thoroughly enjoyed.

Mademoiselle Duprez claimed kindred with the famous French tenor of that name, and had herself been a small celebrity in her way. She had sung at the Opera House in the Rue Lepelletier, in the days when Falcon was Diva, and Halévy's Juive was the success of the hour. Then came a fatal fever, caught at Nice, where she had gone to fulfil an autumnal engagement. Louise Duprez lost the voice which had been her only fortune. Happily, though the voice was gone, the exquisite method learned from Garcia, and ripened at the feet of Rossini, still remained; and by her excellence as a teacher of singing and piano, Mademoiselle Duprez had contrived to make a comfortable living, first in Paris, and afterwards at Plymouth, whither she had

come at the suggestion of Edward Heathcote, who had made her acquaintance at the house of one of his Parisian friends, and who had recommended her to try a residence in Devonshire as a cure for her delicate chest, promising at the same time to do all in his power to help her in finding pupils at Plymouth, where he was at that time Town Clerk.

Mademoiselle Duprez had followed Mr. Heathcote's advice, and had not waited long before she found herself fairly established in the Devonshire sea-port. Hilda had been her first pupil, and Hilda she loved almost as a maiden aunt loves the prettiest and most amiable of her nieces. It was Hilda she quoted to all her other pupils. "You should hear a dear young friend of mine, Miss Heathcote of Bodmin, sing that song," she would say; and an eloquent shrug of her shoulders and elevation of her eyebrows would express how wide the difference between Miss Heathcote's perfection and the shortcoming of the performer then in hand.

Hilda was very fond of the lively little Parisienne: loved to hear her talk, and to learn of her; hung upon her words as she expounded the delicacies of

her native language. Hilda had petted and made much of the little woman whenever she came to The Spaniards; had never spent a day in Plymouth without paying her old mistress a visit. And now in her sorrow and difficulty it was of Louise Duprez she thought, as the one friend whom she could trust with her secret, and who would be able to help her.

Hilda went to her own room before Fräulein Meyerstein returned from her afternoon walk with the twins. Those well-brought-up infants were ruthlessly sent from their playroom, their rocking-horse, and their doll's house, an hour after their early dinner, and were taken for afternoon drill by the Fräulein. Needless to say that they detested the formal trudge along dusty lanes, and abhorred the beauties of Nature encountered on the way; but their health no doubt profited by this severe regimen.

Hilda shut herself in her own rooms for the rest of the evening, with the usual plea of a headache. But she was up before daybreak next morning, and by six o'clock she had packed a small

portmanteau and a Gladstone bag with her own hands, and carried them down surreptitiously to the stable-yard, where she gave them to an underling, with directions to put them in the pony-cart, and take them to Bodmin Road station in time for the eight-o'clock train. She herself intended to walk to the station, as her appearance on foot would be less likely to attract attention than in the pony-cart with the luggage.

So in the dewy morning, alone and unattended, with ashen cheeks and eyelids swollen by long weeping, Hilda Heathcote crept out of her brother's house, and walked across the hills, trusting to the keen breath of the autumn wind to obliterate the traces of a night of anguish before she arrived at the station.

She had written a long letter to Bothwell. This she carried with her, to post in Plymouth; and she had left letters for her brother and for the Fräulein. No one need be made uneasy at her disappearance.

CHAPTER III.

AN ELOPEMENT ON NEW LINES.

Mdlle. Duprez occupied a first floor in an airy terrace of houses overlooking the Hoe. She was the kind of little woman to whom eating and drinking and fine dress are matters of very small moment, but who could not have endured to live in a shabby house or an ugly neighbourhood. All her surroundings were neat and bright and fair to look upon. She had brought over her furniture from Paris. It was the remnant of that furniture which had adorned her great-grandmother's house at Versailles, before the fiery spirits of the *tiers état* met in the tennis-court, and the Revolution began. There was not much of it left, but that little was of the best period in French cabinet-work, and in the most perfect taste.

Louise Duprez loved this heritage from her ancestors as if the chairs and sofa, cabinet and

writing-table, had been living things. She used to sit and contemplate them sometimes, between the lights, in a dreamy mood, and think how much they might have told her about Marie Antoinette and her court, and the old days of the Œil de Bœuf, if they could but have found a voice. The *bonheur du jour*, with its ormolu mounts, looked very human as the firelight shone upon it. The goats' heads seemed to wink and twinkle like human eyes, while the floral mouldings assumed the form of a broad human grin, as who should say, "Ah, I could tell you some fine farces about those ladies, if I could but speak!"

Mademoiselle's rooms were always the pink of neatness; not a book out of line on the shelves above the secrétaire, not a scrap of work or a stray pin-cushion littering the tables; newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, all in their places; while Mademoiselle herself was one of those dainty little women who never have a pin awry in their toilet.

So when Miss Heathcote was ushered into the singing-mistress's *salon* at half-past nine in the morning, her unexpected appearance at such an early hour caused neither confusion nor annoyance.

Mademoiselle had been breakfasting at a table in front of the open window—a temperate meal of coffee and roll, neatly arranged on a tray. Spotless damask and pretty china made the tray a picture, with Mademoiselle's pink cambric gown and bright little face for background.

"My dear child, how early! I am enchanted to see you!" she cried, jumping up and kissing her old pupil on both cheeks. "What a good girl to come to me before my day's work begins! This is one of my full days, from eleven till five. Squall, squall, thump, thump, every kind of outrage upon the genius of harmony must these poor ears of mine suffer; and I must be very polite, all the same; must not lose patience and cry aloud—ah, how I long to do it sometimes!—'My love, you have no more voice than a peacock, no more ear than a four-post bedstead; your accent is diabolical, and you are the very embodiment of idiotcy.' You see one must not be quite frank with one's pupils. But, Hilda, my pet, what is the matter? You have been crying!"

"Not since last night, Mademoiselle," answered

Hilda, looking at her friend with hard, dry eyes; "I cried so much last night that I don't think I shall ever shed a tear again. There must be an end, you know, even to tears."

"My sweetest child, what in Heaven's name has happened? Your brother, Mr. Effecotte!"

Louise Duprez gasped as she spoke the name. Edward Heathcote was her benefactor, that one Englishman whom she admired and honoured with all her heart and mind, whom she thought almost equal to the typical Frenchman, the French gentleman of a *régime* that is almost forgotten, of a day that is dead.

"My brother is quite well, at least as far as I know," answered Hilda, with sisterly indifference; and then she made Mdlle. Duprez sit down, and knelt at her feet, clasping her hands, and looking up at her earnestly. "My dear, kind friend, I want you to help me in a crisis of my life," she said.

"To help you to run away with Mr. Grahame, I suppose. No, no, Hilda, *pas si bête;* I am your brother's friend above all things. If Mr. Effecotte

disapproves of your marriage, I will do nothing to further it."

"Pray don't be in such a hurry," said Hilda. "Hear my trouble first, and then help me to lighten it, if you can. I think you ought to know that I am not the kind of girl to make a runaway marriage."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the kind about any English girl. Runaway marriages seem as common in this country as runaway knocks at my door."

"Englishwomen run away before marriage, and Frenchwomen after," retorted Hilda.

"I don't think your English matrons such irreproachable creatures," said the Parisienne. "There is your Lady Valeria Harborough, for instance, who had one of the best husbands in Christendom, and yet was always surrounded by a bevy of admirers, and made herself more talked about than any woman in Plymouth."

"Was she really talked about?" asked Hilda eagerly.

"Really, really. I don't mean to say that she was supposed to be actually incorrect in her conduct; but she brought her Indian manners back

to England with her, and she had always her court of fools and fops about her. And now the papers are beginning to be impertinent about her—or, at least, this stupid little paper, which models itself on some of the London society papers."

Mdlle. Duprez pointed to a periodical on the table at her side—a sheet of eight pages, printed on pink paper, and calling itself the *Plymouth Censor*. Hilda snatched it up, and ran her eye rapidly along the paragraphs, till she came to one worded thus:

"Rumours are already afloat in privileged circles as to the probabilities of a second hymen for the beautiful widow of a general officer, lately gone over to the majority. Foremost in the betting stands a certain *ci-devant* captain of Engineers, who saved the General's life by a dexterous shot in the jungle, and who has been *du dernier bien* with the General's charming wife ever since. Ours is an age of rehabilitations."

"Lady Valeria was right," murmured Hilda. "People know all about her folly. Her only redemption will be her marriage with Bothwell."

And then she opened her heart to her old friend

—told her everything that had passed between herself and Lady Valeria—told her how she had made up her mind to sacrifice her own happiness rather than to let Bothwell's life be spoiled by a mistaken engagement. At first Mdlle. Duprez ridiculed her plan as Quixotic to absurdity, and refused to have anything to do with it. But the girl's indomitable resolution, her intense earnestness of purpose, prevailed at last over the Frenchwoman's scruples. Louise Duprez, at four-and-forty years of age, was as romantic as the simplest schoolgirl. She had spent the last fifteen years of her life almost entirely among girls. She had been the confidante of their love-affairs, their fond dreams of the ideal; she had counselled and lectured them, had sympathised and sorrowed and joyed with them. And now she was quite ready to be impressed by the heroic element in Hilda's intended sacrifice. The happiness of one young life given away to secure the fame and fortune of another and dearer life. It was a romantic scheme which kindled all Louise Duprez's warmest fancies.

"Would I were young again, to do such a thing

myself for my beloved!" she thought to herself, with a tender sigh for her only lover, who had perished, a burly major of Artillery, on the bloody field of Sedan.

"How shall I ever answer to your brother—my best of friends—if I assist you in rebellion against him?" asked Mdlle. Duprez, after a thoughtful silence.

"I am not rebelling against my brother. I am only leaving my home in order to break an engagement which Edward always disapproved. He gave his consent reluctantly at the last, to please Mrs. Wyllard. He will be very glad to hear that the engagement is cancelled."

"But you have no right to conceal your whereabouts from him."

"The concealment need not last long—only till Bothwell has gone back to his old love; and that I should think will be very soon," with a stifled sob. "There is no use in your being unkind to me. If I do not find a home in France with your aid, I shall find it without you. I have made up my mind to go on to Southampton by the midday train, and to cross

to Havre to-night. The steamer leaves Southampton at ten o'clock. There will be plenty of time for me to get there."

"And you are going alone, without even a maid?"

"Absolutely alone."

"You cannot possibly live alone among strangers—it is out of the question," protested Mademoiselle.

"That is why I ask you to give me an introduction to some friends of yours in a quiet part of Paris, who will take me into their family circle, and help me to carry on my musical education at the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire has been the dream of my life. You must know of such people, with your numerous acquaintance among the musical profession—"

"Yes, no doubt I know of such people. But how am I to reconcile the idea of giving you such an introduction with my duty to your brother?" argued Mdlle. Duprez.

"Your duty to my brother—if there is any such thing—is to find me a respectable home in Paris," said Hilda. "I tell you once for all that I have made up my mind to start for Paris to-night—to live

there in some quiet quarter for the next year or so. I shall go forth in the strength of my own ignorance and courage, like Miss Bird in her journey across the mountains, if you don't help me. Perhaps I may fall among thieves: and mind, if I do, it will be your fault."

She spoke with extraordinary resolution, with an animated air which seemed hardly compatible with grief: Yet this spurious gaiety of hers was the worst symptom of all, and was very close to hysteria.

Louise Duprez could read the meaning that underlay that false air of good spirits. She saw that the girl was nearly heart-broken, and that this resolution of hers which she had taken up so heroically was perhaps the very best possible issue out of her sorrow: for Louise accepted Hilda's own view of the case, and took it for granted that Bothwell was willing to go back to his old love. With her experience as a woman of the world, having seen how selfishness and self-love are the motive-powers that propel the machine called society, Mdlle. Duprez was ready to believe that General

Harborough's death, and Lady Valeria's position as a rich widow, would entirely alter Bothwell's views.

It was very hard for Hilda: but still human nature is human nature, and a young man with his way to carve in the world would hardly regret such an opportunity as a marriage with Lady Valeria Harborough.

Had Hilda allowed matters to take their course, the poor young man would no doubt have gone quietly to his fate; he would have marched heroically up to the altar; he would have settled down with his young wife in the village home he had planned for himself; he would have drudged as a teacher of stupid lads; and he would have repented ever afterwards. What happiness could possibly come to Hilda in a life spent with a disappointed man, who would remember, every day of his toilsome existence, that he had missed fame and fortune for his wife's sake?

"That a man should be fond of teaching for its own sake—*ce n'est pas Dieu possible!*" exclaimed Mdlle. Duprez, with a shuddering reminiscence of her own sufferings.

So, having reasoned thus, she made up her mind to help Hilda to carry out her act of self-abnegation.

"If I did not believe that you are acting for your own ultimate happiness, I would not aid you in this matter by one jot or one tittle," said the little woman, in her own energetic way; "but, as it is, I am going to put on my bonnet and take you to Paris."

This was said in so quiet a manner that Hilda thought her friend was joking.

"You don't mean to go with me?" she began.

"I don't mean to let your brother's sister travel alone, arrive alone, and a stranger, in such a city as Paris. There is no Rue des Fèves now, with its famous Lapin Blanc, where Eugène Sue's thieves used to keep their rendezvous; but for all that has been done, Paris is Paris—and if you have set your mind upon going there, I must go with you."

"But, dear Mademoiselle, think of the trouble, the fatigue—and your lessons."

"My lessons must stand over till my return. I shall be back next Monday. Don't say another

word, Hilda. There's no time to be wasted in talk. You are going to eat your breakfast. I'll wager you left home without so much as a cup of tea."

"There was nobody up," faltered Hilda, who had eaten nothing since Lady Valeria's visit, and who was suffering all the pangs of exhaustion.

"Of course not; and you have been walking and travelling, and are ready to faint at this moment," protested Louise, ringing as she spoke. "You are going to have some nice hot coffee—I have taught them to make coffee in this house, I who speak to you—and an egg, while I write to my pupils to apologise for my sudden disappearance; and precisely at twelve o'clock there will be a fly at the door to take us to the station."

"I have a cheque to cash at the Bank," said Hilda. "Perhaps the maid could get it cashed for me."

"For how much is your cheque?"

"Two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Do you think I would let my poor little slavey trot about Plymouth with two hundred and fifty pounds?" cried Mdlle. "She is as honest as the day;

but the magnitude of the sum would turn her brain. She would walk into the harbour unawares. No, if you have such a cheque as that to cash, you must take it to the Bank yourself; and instead of carrying all the cash with you to Paris, you had better draw only fifty, and leave the two hundred on deposit. You can draw more when you want it."

The slavey answered the bell, a neat little handmaiden in pink cotton, who was told to get breakfast for Miss Heathcote, and to order a fly to be at the door at a quarter to twelve.

"That will allow us fifteen minutes for the Bank," said Mademoiselle, opening her desk, and beginning her letters.

Everything was done in a brisk business-like manner. It was only when they were in the train which was to take them by way of Exeter to Salisbury, and then to Southampton, that Hilda had leisure to realise the step which she had taken.

She had written to Bothwell in perfect frankness, had opened her heart to him, telling him that his happiness was dearer to her than her own, that his honour was paramount in her mind over every

other consideration. And she told him that honour should constrain him to marry the woman who had been compromised by his love in the past, and who loved him unselfishly and devotedly in the present, holding her own pride as nothing when weighed against her love for him.

"No woman could act as Lady Valeria has acted this day to whom love was not all in all," she wrote, pleading her rival's cause, because she thought it was the cause of right, and Bothwell's cause also. "Think how such a woman must have lowered herself in her own self-respect when she came to me, her inferior in social station, her junior by ten years, to make confession of her love. It was for your sake she stooped so low, Bothwell.

"Do not try—out of a mistaken sense of duty—to follow me, or to dissuade me from a decision which is irrevocable. When you receive this letter I shall have entered upon a new phase of life, in which it would be almost impossible for you to find me—and if you did find me, to what end? My mind is made up. Do not allow your kind heart to be tor-

mented by needless remorse. My heart is not broken, dear Bothwell; I mean to live my life peacefully, contentedly; to cultivate new ideas of happiness, wider horizons. You need never be troubled at the thought that this cancelled engagement of ours has broken my life. Be sure only of one thing—that my dearest hope, wherever I may be, will be for your welfare. To know that your life is happy will be enough to fill my cup of joy."

She had written from the depth of her faithful heart, resigning him willingly, having no sense of ill-usage, no anger even against Lady Valeria: only some touch of contempt for a woman who had been an unworthy wife to a noble husband.

And now the thing was done. Her letter, posted in Plymouth by her own hand, was on its way to Bothwell. Could she doubt, knowing what she knew, that the letter would come upon him as a welcome release, would relieve him from a most embarrassing position? And then she remembered that wretched paragraph in the *Censor;* and it seemed to her that Bothwell's first duty in life was to set Lady Valeria right before the world. Even if he had ceased to

love her, his duty was not the less clear; but who could doubt that the old love still held the first place in his heart?

The journey from Plymouth to Southampton seemed woefully long that bright autumn day. The sun was almost as strong as it had been in August, and the light glared in upon Hilda as she sat in the corner of the carriage, very white and very silent, but perfectly calm and collected. Her eyelids were heavy and swollen after the night of weeping, but her eyes were tearless. Louise Duprez gave a furtive look every now and then, to see if the girl was quietly weeping behind the newspaper which she pretended to read; but there were no tears in the wistful eyes, so full of troubled thought.

Once, when they had the compartment to themselves for a little while, between station and station, Louise put out her hand and clasped Hilda's as it held the newspaper.

"Have you changed your mind?" she asked; "you have had plenty of time for thinking in this creeping omnibus-train. Shall we take another train at Exeter, and go back again?"

"Not for the world," answered Hilda firmly. "Do you suppose I did not deliberate before I made up my mind last night? I was thinking all night long."

Mdlle. Duprez gave a little submissive sigh. In her own philosophic mind she was sure the girl was right; but then Mdlle. Duprez had arrived at an age when the surrender of a lover may be borne; and she was keen-witted enough to know that these things were different for Hilda.

It was only in the afternoon of the next day that they arrived at the Saint-Lazare terminus, whence they drove at once to the Hôtel du Bon Lafontaine, on the left side of the Seine, a house much affected by bishops and abbés, and having a semi-clerical and old-world air altogether different from the smart caravanserais in Anglo-American Paris. Hilda was too unhappy to feel any delight in the grandeur of Boulevards, churches, and palaces, which she passed on her way from the station to the hotel. Her aching eyes saw all things dimly, as in a dream. She had only a vague sense of wide streets, glancing river, stupendous architecture, white in the autumn

sun: and then when the carriage had crossed the river there came narrower streets, shabbier houses, an air of busier and more homely life.

Mdlle. Duprez ordered lunch at the hotel, where she was known and welcomed with friendliest greeting by manageress and head-waiter; and Hilda, for the first time in her life, found herself sitting in the public dining-room of a Parisian hotel. Happily at this hour of the day the room was empty; and Hilda and her friend were as much alone at their little table looking into the quaint old Parisian garden as they could have been at The Spaniards.

And now Mdlle. Duprez unfolded her plans. She knew of a family living in the Rue du Bac, an artistic family, the father and sons painters, engravers, caricaturists; one of the daughters literary, another musical and a pupil at the Conservatoire; the mother all that there is of the most *bourgeoise*, but a good creature, devoted to her children—a woman to whose care Mdlle. Duprez felt that she could safely confide her young friend.

"It will be a long jaunt from the Rue du Bac to the Conservatoire in the Rue du Faubourg Pois-

sonnière," she said, "but you and Mathilde can go there together, and it will do you good to take long walks. The only danger is that you may run against your brother on the Boulevard."

"I should not think Edward would stay much longer in Paris," said Hilda.

"Perhaps while he is in Paris it would be safer for you to go in the omnibus," suggested Mdlle. Duprez. "Mr. Heathcote is not likely to be riding in omnibuses."

The little woman trotted off to the Rue du Bac, leaving Hilda to amuse herself with a flabby copy of *L'Univers*, three days old; or to gaze despondently at the stony quadrangle, with its bust of the good Lafontaine, and its three or four evergreens. Seen by those melancholy eyes of hers, the garden looked like a family vault, with the good Lafontaine for the father of the race.

Mdlle. Duprez came back in less than an hour. She had seen that dear good soul Mdme. Tillet, and had settled everything. Mdme. Tillet would be happy to receive Miss Heathcote, and would be to her as a mother. By putting her two daughters

into one room, she could contrive to spare a neat little sleeping apartment for the new inmate. Things were somewhat Bohemian in the house; but what would you expect with a gifted and eccentric family? Everything was scrupulously clean. There triumphed the household genius, Mdme. Tillet, born in an old farmhouse in Brittany, where you might have eaten your dinner off the red brick floor.

Mathilde Tillet, the musical daughter, was prepared to welcome Miss Heathcote as a sister. There was no one in the family besides herself who cared a straw for classical music, from Beethoven to Raff. The brothers all believed in the *Madame Angot* school, and had no sympathy for anything loftier. Poor Mathilde had been pining for sympathy; and to have a young companion who would toil at Bach's fugues and preludes, and cram Chopin, Raff, and Brahms, and trudge to the Conservatoire with her, would be delightful.

"They are going to make much of you," said Louise Duprez, "I will answer for that in advance. My only fear is that the three brothers will all fall

in love with you, and then there will be storms. They are rather fiery spirits."

"I shall not give them any provocation," said Hilda; and indeed the pale grave face, with the troubled look in the eyes, was not suggestive of coquetry.

"Mdme. Tillet promises to be ready to receive you to-morrow," continued Mdlle. Duprez. "I have agreed for you to pay her her own terms, which I do not think exorbitant, considering that everything in Paris is execrably dear. You are to pay her ten pounds a calendar month, which is to include everything, even to your laundress."

"It sounds very cheap," said Hilda, and she would have said the same if the sum had been twenty pounds, or even forty. She was not in a state of mind in which to consider pounds, shillings, and pence.

Mdlle. Duprez insisted upon taking her to see some of the sights of Paris—Notre Dame, the Louvre—and then they drove to the Conservatoire, and made inquiries as to the conditions under which Miss Heathcote, as a stranger, might be allowed to take lessons from the professors attached to that insti-

tution. She was to take singing lessons from Monsieur Somebody of great renown, and music lessons from Madame Somebody of equal renown. She was to have in all four lessons a week, on four different days; and it seemed to Mdlle. Duprez that she would thus be too closely occupied to have leisure for brooding on her grief. The professors of the Parisian Conservatoire are very severe in their teaching, and a good deal of work is required of a pupil. The pianiste must play her portion of Chopin and her tale of Bach without book at the second time of hearing. The vocalist must give proof that she has laboured earnestly at her *solfeggi*.

After the business interview at the Conservatoire, where the name of Mdlle. Duprez was a power, the kindly little Frenchwoman ordered the coachman to drive by the Boulevard and the Parc Monceau to the Bois de Boulogne. She steeped her young friend in the glory and beauty of Paris, hoping to prevent the possibility of much thought amidst so new and bright a world. And then she proposed that they should get seats at the Comédie Française, where a new play of Sardou's was being acted.

Hilda roused herself from the lethargy in which she had looked at the splendours of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the brightness of the Bois, to protest against the idea of the theatre.

"I am not going to pretend to amuse myself when I am miserable," she said. "I mean to forget Bothwell by and by, or to think of him only as a dear friend whose happiness makes me happy; but I cannot pretend to have forgotten him to-day. I won't go to the theatre and make believe to be amused. I should feel as if I were seeking pleasures abroad when there was some one that I loved lying dead at home. But that need not prevent your seeing Sardou's play, dear Mademoiselle. I can stay quietly at the hotel, and read myself to sleep."

"My child, I don't care a straw for Sardou's play, except as a means of making you forget your troubles. We will go and take a quiet cup of tea with Mdme. Tillet, so that you may get reconciled to your new surroundings. That will be much better; and then you must go to bed early and get a good night's rest."

They dined at the hotel, in the odour of sanctity,

as it were, for a bishop and a curé were dining at the table next them, and dining uncommonly well, with a nice appreciation of the *plat du jour*, and of some excellent chambertin which appeared towards the close of the entertainment.

"I hope you won't be horrified when you hear that the Tillets live over a shop," said Mdlle. Duprez, as she and Hilda were walking down the Rue de Grenelle on their way to the Rue du Bac. "It is only a quiet little glover's shop, but I thought the idea might shock you."

"I am not at all shocked. I should not be, even, if Mdme. Tillet kept the shop," answered Hilda, smiling her faint sweet smile, which told of a gentle nature and a heart in pain.

They came to the glover's shop presently, a very obscure little shop in a street where there are many big shops; shops of renown, even, like the Petit Saint-Thomas, and the Bon Marché, the Whiteley of Paris. There was a private door beside the glover's. A narrow passage and a dark staircase conducted to the abode of the Tillets, which was on the second floor, and the approach to which echoed

with sonorous laughter and manly voices, with an admixture of girlish treble.

"The children are all at home," said Mdlle. Duprez, who had been accustomed to hear Mdme. Tillet talk of her bearded and well-grown brood as "mes enfants."

Hilda found herself presently in the bosom of the family, being embraced by Mdme. Tillet, who was a stout, comfortable-looking matron in a gray cashmere gown and black mittens. The family sitting-room was a spacious apartment, with piano, book-cases, easels, drawing-tables, work-tables, all the means of various kinds of study and art; and it seemed overflowing with human life. Half-buried in an armchair by the hearth reclined the father; the three sons, Adolphe, Victor, and Frédéric, were seated at different tables, each with his particular lamp; and the two daughters sat on each side of a large work-basket, stitching industriously at a new gown which they were making together.

"Welcome, my sweet young friend," said Mdme. Tillet, and then proceeded to introduce her children.

Adolphe, the eldest, was distinguished for his etchings, and rose from his delicate work upon a sheet of copper to receive the new inmate. He was a big bearded fellow, with a mahogany complexion and slouching shoulders, in manners and disposition as simple as a child. Victor was a wood-engraver, who worked for Hachette on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, hard by, and earned more money than any one else in the family. Frédéric was the genius, a caricaturist. He drew for the *Petit Journal* and the *Vie Parisienne*, and devoted his days and nights to the concoction of *bêtises* for those papers. Ten years ago the father had been on the high road to fame and fortune as a painter of *genre;* but he had let other runners in the race go by him, somehow; and now the family *pot-au-feu* was supplied by the industry of the children, while the father dreamed his day-dreams, and reviled his more successful contemporaries, by the domestic hearth. The sons were great hulking, soft-hearted fellows, who adored their mother, tolerated their father's idleness without a murmur, and had no fault except that of a disposition to fall in love at the very slightest provocation.

Marcelline, the elder daughter, gained her share of the family *pâtée* by the exercise of her pen. She wrote for two or three fashion-magazines, and was an authority upon the ways and customs, the houses and gowns, of the great world, under various high-sounding *noms de plume*. She signed herself in one paper La Comtesse Boisjoli, in another La Marquise de la Vallière. Needless to add that she had never crossed the thresholds of those great houses which she described so glibly. She obtained her information from shopkeepers, her glimpses of society from the pavement on which rank and beauty alighted for an instant in their passage from the carriage to the hall-door. All the rest was evolved from a lively inner-consciousness.

Mathilde was the more serious sister, devoted to art for art's sake; believing in Bach and the severe school as the highest ideal in life, worshipping the memory of Berlioz, and despising those vanities which occupied the thoughts of her elder sister.

All the family made Hilda welcome. They praised her French, pronounced falteringly in a paroxysm of shyness. The girls took off her hat

and jacket, and installed her in a comfortable chair, while Madame bustled about with the *bonne*, and set out a tea-tray and a feast of sweet cakes such as Frenchwomen love. Nothing could be more fortunate than that dear Mdlle. Duprez and her sweet young friend had dropped in to tea this evening, protested Mdme. Tillet, for they were momentarily expecting a visit from one of the most intellectual men in Paris, Sigismond Trottier. "You must have heard of M. Trottier," said Madame; "his name must be known in London as well as it is in Paris."

Hilda blushingly admitted that she knew very little of London, and that she had never heard of M. Trottier.

"Really! But he must have a world-wide fame. The *Taon*, for which he writes, has made a greater sensation than even the *Lanterne* in the days of Napoleon III. The last defeat of the Government was ascribed to the influence of the *Taon*. The *Taon* has done more to undermine the Conservative party than any other paper," said M. Tillet from the depths of his easy-chair. "Yet politics are not Trottier's chief forte. As a politician he is trenchant

and effective, but as a writer upon social topics he is really great."

The *bonne* opened the door and announced "M. Trottier," and Hilda looked anxiously at the newcomer, finding herself for the first time in her life in the company of a literary genius.

She would have liked to see the literary genius in a cleaner shirt; but she had stories of Chatterton, of Savage, and Johnson and Goldsmith at heart; and it seemed to her only natural that genius should be rather dirty, and clad in a greasy olive-green coat, that genius should have long gray hair, bushy eyebrows, and a cadaverous visage. She sat in her corner silently, and did not expect to be noticed; but M. Tillet presented his friend to her in a special manner, and to her surprise the olive-green genius gave a little start at mention of her name.

"Effecotte!" he exclaimed; "are all the English people, who are not Smith or Brown, called Effecotte? Or is this young lady related to my old friend M. Edouard Effecotte, of Cornouailles?"

"Grand Dieu," exclaimed Mdlle. Duprez, "what a small world it is we live in!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE LAND OF BOHEMIA.

HILDA looked nervously to the right and to the left, like some wild creature brought to bay, seeking some outlet whereby she could escape. Those keen black eyes scrutinising her from under shaggy gray eyebrows, that cadaverous countenance with its lantern jaws, seemed to her as the face of a grinning fiend. This man, whom she had never seen in her life before, had but to hear her name mentioned, and at once knew all about her. This Paris, which she had thought of as a wilderness where she and her sorrow might hide, was a kind of trap into which she had fallen. Above all things she had wished to avoid any encounter with her brother, whose affection or whose idea of brotherly duty might interfere with her scheme of self-sacrifice.

Sigismond Trottier contemplated her curiously with his cynical smile, amused at her embarrass-

ment, reading whole histories in her changing colour, her look of absolute terror. Something wrong here, he told himself. A pretty girl, fallen among this band of Bohemians in Paris, without the knowledge of her kindred. One of those social mysteries which Sigismond had such a happy knack at unravelling.

"Edward Heathcote is my brother," faltered Hilda, at last, "but he does not know that I am in Paris. I do not wish him to know."

"Consider me dumb for ever upon the subject of your residence here, Mademoiselle," said Sigismond, with a respectful bow. "A lady's wish is a command."

He shook hands with his old friend the painter. They had been chums for the last twenty years; and it was to his delight in Sigismond Trottier's society, among other causes, that M. Tillet owed his decadence as an artist. It was not that he had loved art less, but he had loved the Boulevard more. He had given up his nights to wit and pleasure; and he had found his working days curiously shortened in consequence. He had been renowned as one of the finest talkers upon art, famed for his burning

eloquence when he praised the great painters of the past, and for his scathing wit when he ridiculed the little painters of the present; for he had even thus early fallen to that stage in the idler's career, when a man's chief consolation is to undervalue contemporaneous merit. He had lived and enjoyed his life in those days, had spent his money faster than he earned it, and had fallen into the ranks of failure, to be supported by the toil of his wife and her children, to be the family log, the family disease. They were all very patient, those children of his. They worked for him and admired him, believed in him almost. They admired the great genius he might have been if he had only worked. They valued him for potentialities of greatness of which he talked sometimes, in his dreamy way; as if those idle aspirings had been actual achievements.

The shabby old *salon*, with its dark-red paper, stained and faded with age, was glorified by some of M. Tillet's pictures, painted before his slothful hand had begun to lose its cunning. There hung the portrait of a beautiful duchess, exquisitely painted—a lovely head, an ideal neck and shoulders, in white

satin and brown fur, like an old Venetian picture. The head had been successful, but shoulders, arms, and draperies were still unfinished. The picture had been a commission, an offering from the Duchess to her distinguished father, a Minister of State, on his fête. But the fête had come and gone, and the portrait was not ready. Time had been conceded, and more time, and still the draperies remained unfinished, and still the picture was not fit to leave the painter's studio. Finally the commission had been cancelled. Some lesser genius had painted the Duchess, briskly, punctually, readily, out of hand. These meaner souls can go in harness. And the meaner soul received the seven thousand francs which were to have been paid to M. Tillet, and the painter had his unfinished picture, as a kind of pendant to his incomplete life. Happily, those trustful sons and daughters of his were very proud of that unfinished portrait, and of the four or five sketches for *genre* pictures, never painted, which adorned the family *salon*. There was not another man in France who could paint like their father, they said, or who had such talent in composition. Meissonier would

have been nowhere in the race if Eugène Tillet had but stuck to his easel.

Trottier and Tillet began to talk, and the sons went on with their work in a free-and-easy manner, while Madame and the daughters waited upon their guests. Poor Hilda had been so unnerved by this unexpected encounter with a friend of her brother's that she could only falter the feeblest replies to Marcelline and Mathilde, who tried to make themselves at home with her.

Marcelline, who was rather strong-minded, lost patience at last, and asked Mdlle. Duprez, in an undertone, as she handed a plate of *petits fours*, if her young friend was not just a trifle stupid.

"She is as clever as you and your sister, and that is saying a good deal," replied Louise Duprez, in the same undertone; "but she has just suffered a great heart-blow, and that kind of thing is not calculated to make one particularly lively."

This was enough for Marcelline, who was very tender-hearted. She went back to her seat next Hilda, and took her hand at the first opportunity.

"I hope we are going to be great friends," she

murmured, "although you and Mathilde will have more in common. I long to hear you sing. Mdlle. Duprez says you have such a lovely voice. But perhaps you are too tired to sing to-night."

"If you will excuse me," faltered Hilda.

"Of course, we will excuse you. You must be very tired, after travelling all night. And you were dreadfully sea-sick, no doubt?"

"No, I escaped that suffering. I am never sea-sick."

"Good heavens, is that possible? If I go but a little way on the sea, the least little way, I suffer tortures, veritable agonies. And you others, you English, do not seem to suffer at all. You are a kind of sea-dogs, to whom waves and tempest are a natural element."

"I was brought up near the coast," answered Hilda. "I have been out in all weathers."

And then she thought of that wild, rock-bound coast on which she and Bothwell were to have lived, they two, all in all to each other, ineffably happy amidst simplest surroundings. She thought of the boat they were to have had—the cockle-shell row-

boat in which they were to have gone dancing over the waves from Tintagel to Boscastle, or by Trebarwith sands, shining golden in the sunlight—in a bright world of life and clamour, the bird-world of gulls and cormorants, a winged populace, rejoicing in sea-foam, and light, and the music of the winds. She thought of the life that was to have been—the fairy fabric of the future, which had seemed so beautiful and so real, and which her ruthless hand had shattered.

Had she done right in so surrendering that fair future? Yes, again and again yes. The level domestic life which would have been so sweet to her as a woman would have been stagnation, a slow decay for an ambitious man. Her simple rustic rearing had prepared her for such a life. The monotony of a village existence was all-sufficient for her narrower views, her more concentrated nature. But Bothwell had seen the world, had lived in the thick of the strife; and it was most unnatural that he should resign all ambition, and live from day to day, working for his daily bread, like a labourer in the fields. He was to do this for her sake, his sole

reward her love. It would have been, indeed, a one-sided bargain.

Hilda heard the light, airy talk around her—the talk about art and music and theatres, about the great world and its scandals—as in a dream. It was a world of which she knew nothing; and the conversation around her seemed as if it had been carried on in a kind of verbal hieroglyphics. The French she heard to-night was a new language—made up of catchwords and slang phrases—lines from new plays, words twisted into new meanings—in a word, the language of the Palais Royal Theatre, and the *Vie Parisienne*. Hilda listened and wondered, most of all when Mdlle. Duprez, that most classical and academical of speakers, showed herself perfectly at home in this little language of Bohemian Paris.

Sigismond Trottier was a favourite in the Tillet household. His visits were rare, and he never appeared before nine o'clock in the evening. He came nominally to tea, and the weak infusion of Bohea and the dainty little dishes of sweet cakes were always set forth at his coming; but the refreshment he most cared for was absinthe, and a small

bottle of that dangerous liqueur and a carafe of water were always placed on the little table near the host's armchair, and from this bottle M. Trottier supplied himself. That greenish hue of his complexion was the livery of the absinthe-drinker, whose skin gradually assumes the colour of his favourite stimulant.

Trottier was dear to Eugène Tillet as a link with that brilliant past which was now but a memory. He liked to hear the journalist talk of the great men who had failed, and of the little men who had succeeded in art and literature. Strange that all the great men should have gone to the dogs, while all the little men had been pushing forward to the front.

It was like a game at draughts, in which the white men seem to be winning with a rush, when somehow the black men edge in stealthily here and there, in front, behind, at odd corners, until those splendid white fellows are all pushed off the board. To hear Trottier and Tillet talk, it would seem as if the chief characteristic of true genius was an irretrievable bent towards the gutter.

The journalist's visits in the Rue du Bac were never long. He had to leave at half-past ten, in order to write his paragraphs for the next number of the *Taon*, to be issued early next morning.

Mdlle. Duprez took leave at the same time as M. Trottier, and the journalist offered to escort the two ladies to their hotel, an arrangement which the Frenchwoman had foreseen. The street was very quiet at this hour, and as the pavement was narrow Mdlle. Duprez had an excuse for asking Hilda to walk a few yards in front, while she herself talked confidentially with M. Trottier.

"You no doubt think it is very strange that my young friend should be in Paris without her brother's knowledge," she said tentatively.

"Life is so full of strange events that I have long left off wondering or speculating about anything," he replied easily. "I have no doubt Mees Effecotte is a most charming young person."

"Ah, but I want you to know more about her than that. I want you to understand that she is just as good as she is charming. She is brave, unselfish, noble, capable of self-sacrifice—and there

are a good many charming girls who are none of these things. There is nothing underhand in her presence in this city without her brother's knowledge. I, Louise Duprez, give you my word for that, and ask you as a favour to respect her secret."

"I have already pledged myself to do that, *chère demoiselle*. Indeed, I am not likely to see much more of Mr. Effecotte. He wanted my help in a matter in which I was at first willing to aid him, but in which I afterwards saw peril to a man whom I had known and liked in the past."

"I wished you to know that Mr. Heathcote's sister is in no way unworthy of her brother's love and protection. She is here to break off an engagement which would in all probability have ended unhappily."

"You need tell me no more. Your young friend is in very good hands. Mdme. Tillet is one of the best women I know; the true heart of motherhood beats under that broad chest of hers. She will take good care of your young friend in this dangerous city of Paris."

They parted at the entrance to the Bon Lafon-

taine, where Hilda and her friend had two little bedrooms adjoining each other, and where Hilda slept a troubled sleep, wearied by the fatigue of her journey, but haunted by sad thoughts even in the midst of her slumbers.

She transferred herself and her few belongings to the Rue du Bac next morning, and then went with Mdlle. Duprez to the Bon Marché, where she bought all she wanted, including two neat little ready-made gowns, one of gray alpaca, and the other of black cashmere, and a black velvet toque which gave her the true Parisian air.

"It was very wise of you to bring so little luggage. English gowns would have stamped you at once as an Englishwoman, and would have made people stare at you. In those neat little frocks you may pass anywhere unobserved," said Mademoiselle approvingly.

"Except for your fair young face, which is brighter than the typical face of the Boulevard," thought Louise Duprez, who did not care to praise her *protégée* too much.

She only stayed to see Hilda fairly installed in

her new home, and left Paris by an afternoon train which would take her to Havre in time for the evening boat. She would be at Southampton next morning, and at Plymouth in the afternoon. Hilda went to the railway-station with her friend, full of gratitude for her kindness, kissing her with warmest thanks at parting.

"Heaven knows whether I have done right or wrong, child, in helping you," said the Quixotic little woman, with a doubtful sigh. "I have allowed myself to be guided by the instinct of my heart, and a woman's heart is not always a wise counsellor. If that young man of yours does not care for his wealthy widow, a nice mess I have helped you to make of two lives."

"But he does care for her. He loved her devotedly for three years. A man cannot change all at once," argued Hilda; "and she is so elegant, so aristocratic — fascinating, no doubt, when she chooses. Bothwell could not help loving her."

"Then he ought not to have pretended to love you," retorted Louise Duprez severely.

"That was my fault," said Hilda, with a sigh.

The signal for departure sounded, and the friends said good-bye. Mathilde had accompanied Hilda to the station, and had waited discreetly at a little distance during those last confidences. The two girls walked home to the Rue du Bac together, Hilda fearing lest she should run against her brother at any moment.

And now Hilda's new life began in earnest, a life in a strange household, amidst new surroundings. She was to try and find consolation in hard work, in her love of music—to create for herself new interests, if it were possible, while every moment of her life was haunted by thoughts of the lover she had deserted, and the home that was to have been hers.

She took her first lesson at the Conservatoire on the following Monday morning, and the professor who taught her was very encouraging about her voice and talent. He told her she possessed an organ worthy of the highest cultivation, capable of the grandest development. He put aside the little German song which she had taken with her, and gave her a solo of Glück's.

"You were taught by Mdlle. Duprez, I under-

stand," he said. "An admirable woman, quite an admirable manner—one of Garcia's best pupils, and one of the few women capable of profiting to the uttermost by Garcia's teaching. You have been taught in the best school, Mademoiselle, and you have nothing to unlearn. That is saying a great deal. On the other hand, I need not tell you that you have a great deal to learn."

"I am sure of that, sir. I have come to Paris on purpose to profit by your instructions."

"With a view to appearing in opera?"

"O, no," exclaimed Hilda, blushing; "I have no such lofty ambition. I only want to sing a little better than I do—to amuse my brother."

"That is a very limited horizon."

"And for my own pleasure in good music."

"I see. Art for art's sake. There are very few nowadays who care to work for art in the abstract. I shall be very proud of such a pupil."

Hilda's fresh young face—fresh in its youthfulness, despite the settled sadness in the eyes—her blushes and simplicity, had fascinated the gray-headed singing-master. Louise Duprez had hinted

at Hilda's story—a broken engagement, a girl's first sorrow. He had been told that his new pupil was an English girl of good family, brought up in a remote province, inexperienced, pure-minded; and he who had for the last forty years been steeped in the vanity, vices, and falsehoods of the great garish city felt his heart drawn towards this gentle girl, with her faint perfume of well-bred rusticity.

"You have a very fine voice, my dear child, and it is a great pity you are not obliged to earn your own living," he said, smiling at her, as he rose from the piano. "I shall expect you to sing me that scena in first-rate style next Wednesday."

CHAPTER V.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

To be on the very threshold of Paradise, within the sound of celestial birds and the perfume of celestial flowers, to be on the point of entering the blissful place, with heart full of hope and pride, and to have the gates suddenly slammed in one's face, and to hear the voice of the angel at the gate crying "Ye cannot enter now," would be perhaps to feel as Bothwell Grahame felt after he had read and read again that calmly worded letter in which Hilda Heathcote renounced him and his love.

His senses staggered under the force of the blow. He cursed Valeria Harborough in the rage of his tortured heart. This was her work. This was the work of that serpent who had beguiled him to forfeit good faith and honour in the past, and who wanted to ruin his life in the present. Those ideas of fortune, of a lofty ambition to be realised through

Valeria's aid, which Hilda put forth in her letter, hardly entered into his mind; but had Valeria been able to make him Prime Minister, or Viceroy of India, by a motion of her hand, he would have cared for her no more than he cared for her in her present insignificance, as a well-born widow with so many thousands a year.

The infatuation which had once held him was a thing of the past, the glamour was over, the light extinguished. He looked back and wondered that he could have ever been so enslaved, so poor a creature as to worship a thoroughly artificial woman.

His first feeling about Hilda after reading her letter was one of anger. He told himself that this renunciation had another motive than that expressed in the letter. It was not in order to give him back to Lady Valeria that his betrothed revoked her promise. It was in order that she herself might escape from an engagement which for some secret reason had become distasteful to her.

"She draws back at the eleventh hour," he said to himself. "Perhaps even at the last she has begun to doubt me—to believe that I may be after

all the miscreant my kindly neighbours thought me, the murderer of a helpless girl. Who knows? That idea was rooted in her brother's mind at the time. It may have transferred itself to her mind when she found herself on the eve of marriage with a suspected man. Women are given to curious fancies and caprices; and she—she whom I thought so brave, so noble, so straight—she too may have her crooked moments, her waverings, and unstableness, like the rest of her sex."

He read the letter again—tried to project his mind into the mind of the writer, to look behind the words, as it were, and by sheer intensity of thinking to get at the hidden meaning between those lines. No, she was not the unstable being he had been inclined to think her in his first agony of wounded feeling. No—a thousand times no. This letter of hers had been written in all simplicity, in all honesty. She gave him up to another, believing that his happiness lay that way. And it was Valeria who had done this thing—Valeria who had come between him and happiness. In his savage anger he felt inclined to rush off to Plymouth, to lie in wait for that old

idol of his—that false goddess with feet of basest clay—to insult her before the face of society, to put some public inextinguishable slight upon her.

She was a woman, exempt in her feebleness; and he could do nothing except rage impotently at the thought of her iniquity, gnash his teeth at that inexcusable foolishness of his past life which had made him her slave.

Her slave? No, not her slave; that he would never be. Her victim, perhaps, yes. She might blast his hopes in their fulness; she might ruin his life; but she should never bend his neck to the yoke.

"Her money, her influence, my position as her husband! Are those the baits with which she tempts me to her net?" he said to himself. "How little she knows me! how little she knows the value of a true woman when weighed against a false one! My true love is more to me than an empress. Millions would not buy my allegiance to her."

He went to the inn stables where Glencoe was at livery, and saddled the powerful beast with his own hands, in his eagerness to be on the way to Bodmin.

Glencoe had enjoyed a day of leisure and meditation in a very dark stable, and he left the little village of Trevena in a series of buck-jumps, arching his vigorous back and sniffing the ground with his quivering nostrils, shying ferociously at every stray pig, and standing up on end at the vision of a donkey, until the corrective influence of the spur brought him to a better state of mind, whereupon he collected himself, and settled into a grand rhythmical trot.

The hunter was white with dust and foam by the time Bothwell rode him into the stable-yard at The Spaniards, where nothing but disappointment awaited him. He heard that Miss Heathcote had left home early on the previous morning. One of the lads had taken her portmanteau to Bodmin Road, and she had walked there alone, in time for the eight-o'clock train for Plymouth. She had taken a ticket for Plymouth, the boy believed. Mr. Heathcote had not yet returned from France. There was nobody at home except Miss Meyerstein and the little girls.

Bothwell asked to see Miss Meyerstein, and was shown into the drawing-room, where that worthy

woman soon came to him, full of trepidation. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping, and her cheeks were pallid with care.

"Mr. Heathcote may think it my fault," she said. "I have telegraphed to him; but there has been no answer yet."

"Do you know where Miss Heathcote was going when she left this house?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. All I know is what the boy told me. I have tried to make the best of things to the servants, for I don't want them to suppose that Hilda was running away; but they must have their own ideas about it, knowing as they do that she was going to be married next Tuesday."

"Never mind the servants," said Bothwell impatiently. "Let them think what they please. But have you no idea where she would be likely to go—to what friend, in what direction? She cannot have so many friends from whom to choose in such a crisis. She would go to the house where she was most sure of a welcome, where she would know that her secret would be kept. What friends has she in Plymouth?"

"None. She never went to Plymouth except for shopping, sight-seeing, concerts, or something in that way, with her brother, or with me. She knows no one in Plymouth except her old singing mistress."

"She may have gone to her," said Bothwell eagerly.

"Hardly likely. Mdlle. Duprez lives in two rooms. Hilda would scarcely ask for hospitality there."

"I don't know. She is very fond of Mdlle. Duprez. I have heard her say so. That is a clue, at any rate. I shall go to Mdlle. Duprez this afternoon. I must walk across to Penmorval and see my cousin first. She may know more of Hilda's plans than you do."

"That is very likely. Mrs. Wyllard is Hilda's most intimate friend."

"There was a lady came to call upon Miss Heathcote a few days ago," said Bothwell. "Did you happen to see that lady?"

"I did not," answered the Fräulein, looking at him curiously. "Yet I can but think that lady had something to do with Hilda's strange conduct. She

is an old friend of yours, I believe—Lady Valeria Harborough."

"Yes, I have known her for some years. Was she long with Hilda?"

"She was closeted with her for at least an hour, and from that time to this I have not seen Hilda's face. She went to her room soon after Lady Valeria left. She excused herself from appearing at dinner on account of a headache, and when I went to her door later in the evening she refused to let me in, and I could hear from her voice that she had been crying. I went to her room again at seven o'clock next morning, for my mind had been uneasy about her all night; but she was gone. I found two letters, one for Mr. Heathcote, and one for me."

"Would you be kind enough to show me the letter she wrote to you?"

The Fräulein reflected for a few moments, being an eminently cautious person, and then produced Hilda's note from her pocket-book.

"I do not think there can be any harm in showing it to you," she said. "There is so little in it."

The letter ran thus:

"Dear Fräulein,—Do not be alarmed at my disappearance. I have good and sound reasons for cancelling my engagement with Mr. Grahame—not because of any wrong act upon his part, but for motives of my own; and I have decided upon leaving home for some time, as the best way of getting over the difficulty. Pray let no fuss be made about this sudden change in my plans. Very few of our neighbours knew anything about the intended marriage; so I hope there will be less talk than there usually is under such circumstances. You need have no uneasiness about me, as I am going to act under the advice of a clever and experienced friend, and I mean to be quite happy in my own way, amidst new surroundings, and to carry out an old desire of my heart. You shall hear of me directly I feel myself at liberty to tell you more.—Always lovingly yours, HILDA."

"An old desire of her heart," said Bothwell slowly, staring at the letter, with the keenest mortification expressed in his countenance.

That cheerfulness which Hilda had assumed in

her letter to the governess smote her lover to the heart. A man's mind is not subtle enough to cope with the subtleties of a woman's conduct. Hilda's chief aim in writing that letter had been to hoodwink the Fräulein, to satisfy her with the assurance that she, Hilda, was going away from home in tranquil spirits and with hopeful views of the future. Bothwell saw in this cheery letter the evidence of a stony heart, a heart that had never loved him.

"'An old desire of her heart,'" he repeated, with a helpless air. "What can that mean?"

"I haven't a notion," replied the Fräulein, reflecting his helplessness upon her own commonplace countenance, "unless it were that she has an idea of going on the stage. So many girls are mad about the stage nowadays. And Hilda is so pretty. I know when we had private theatricals here last Christmas for the twins' juvenile party, everybody was in raptures with Hilda's acting. People told her she would make a great sensation if she were to appear in London."

"People are a parcel of idiots!" cried Bothwell savagely. "Yes, I remember the theatricals. I

was at the party, you know; and there was a cub who made love to Hilda. Yes, I remember."

The cub in question was the eldest son of a neighbouring landowner, and heir to a fine estate; but Bothwell had looked on the innocent lad with abhorrence, even in those early days when his own attachment to Hilda had been in its dawn.

"No, she would not think of going on the stage," said Bothwell, after a pause, during which he had paced up and down the room two or three times in an agitated way; "that is impossible. She would not be mad enough for that. There must be something else. The desire of her heart. What can it mean?"

The Fräulein could not offer any suggestion, except that idea of the stage. "She is so passionately fond of Shakespeare," she said. "I have heard her recite the whole of Juliet and Portia without faltering. She has such a memory. I shouldn't be surprised if she were to come out as Juliet at Covent Garden next week."

Miss Meyerstein's sole knowledge of the London stage was derived from biographies of the Kembles

and their contemporaries. She believed in the two patent theatres as existing facts; and she thought that Shakespearean *débutantes* were appearing and taking the town by storm periodically all the year round.

"I must go to Plymouth by the five-o'clock train," said Bothwell hurriedly. "Will you kindly let my horse stay in your stables and be looked after till to-morrow morning, Miss Meyerstein? I rode him over here at a rather unmerciful rate, and he'll be all the better for a rest. I shall walk to Penmorval, and get myself driven from there to the station. Good-bye."

He had gone before the Fräulein could answer him; but that good-natured person rang the bell and requested that Mr. Grahame's horse might be taken care of for the night, and that anything he required might be given to him.

Bothwell found his cousin full of sympathy, but was unable to give him any advice or assistance, as Miss Meyerstein had been. To Dora he opened his heart fully, showing her Hilda's letter, and breaking out every now and then into angry denunciations of Lady Valeria.

"Hush, Bothwell, don't be so violent," pleaded Dora, putting her hand to his lips. "I agree with you that it was a wicked thing for Lady Valeria to do—to put forward her own weakness in the past and your wrong-doing as a claim upon you in the present. I can understand poor Hilda's conduct. She was only too ready to believe that you must naturally care more for Lady Valeria than for her."

"Help me to find her, Dora. That is all I want. I will soon teach her which it is I love best. But I don't believe she really cared for me. She had some other fancy—some other dream."

"No, Bothwell, no."

"I have seen it in her own handwriting," said Bothwell moodily; and then he told his cousin of that letter which Hilda had written to the Fräulein, and that curious phrase about an old desire of her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW SUCH THINGS END.

"An old desire of her heart," repeated Dora wonderingly. "What could that be? I am sure she had but one wish in this world, and that was to make your life happy."

"If that had been so, if she had been single-hearted, she would not have been so easily frightened away from me," argued Bothwell. "She would have laughed Valeria to scorn, strong in the power of her own love. No, it was because she was half-hearted that she gave way. There was this old desire of her heart, which could only be gratified by throwing me over."

"Bothwell, you are unworthy of her when you talk like that."

"She has proved herself unworthy of me," retorted Bothwell savagely. "Perhaps, after all, it was that beardless cub, young St. John, she cared

for—an Etonian of nineteen, with a pretty face and missish manners. Perhaps it was of him she was thinking when she wrote about an old desire of her heart."

"Bothwell, I am ashamed of you. Hilda's heart is one of the truest that ever beat in a woman's breast. This very foolishness in running away from her own happiness is only a new proof of her noble nature."

"An old desire of her heart," harped Bothwell; "read me that riddle if you can."

"I can only read it in one way," answered Dora, after a thoughtful silence. "Ever so long before your return from India, Hilda had an ambition to do something great in music. She had been told that her voice was of the finest quality, and only required severe training in order to become an exceptional voice. She wanted to go abroad—to Milan, Leipsic, Paris—she talked of different places in her castle-building—and to give herself up to the study of music and the cultivation of her voice. The only difficulty was, that as Mr. Heathcote's sister, and with an independence inherited from her mother, there was no

excuse for her taking up music as a profession, while it would have seemed unreasonable to leave her friends and her home merely to improve herself as an amateur. We often discussed this question together, and I used to advise her to abandon the idea of leaving her brother, whose life would have been altogether lonely without her. I told her that if ever Mr. Heathcote married again, she would then be free to do what she liked with her life. But by and by you appeared upon the scene, and Hilda resumed her love for fox-hunting, and neglected her piano. After this I heard no more of her yearning for a higher school of music than she could find in England."

"Perhaps you are right," said Bothwell, with a penitent look. "There is only one person to whom Hilda would be likely to go in Plymouth, and that is her old singing mistress."

"Mdlle. Duprez; yes, that is a person whom she would naturally consult," answered Dora. "I know all about Mdlle. Duprez, a sweet little woman."

"Dora, will you let one of your people drive me to the station, in time for the next train?"

"With pleasure. But you must have something to eat before you go. You look as if you had not had any lunch."

"I daresay I look very miserable. No, I have not been in the humour for eating since I got Hilda's letter this morning. I walked half a mile to meet the postman, in my impatience for my true love's letter, and when it came it was a staggerer."

"And you have ridden all the way from Trevena, and have had nothing to eat?"

"I forgot all about it; but I will take a crust and a glass of wine before I start. Has Wyllard heard of Hilda's disappearance?"

"Yes, he has been very much troubled about it. He had set his heart upon this marriage, and on its celebration while he is well enough to be present. God knows how long he may have strength enough to bear even as much fatigue as that. He is very angry with Hilda."

"He must not be angry with her. It is my sin that has caused this misery. I have sown the wind, and I have reaped the whirlwind. You are very good to bear with me in my trouble, Dora."

She was infinitely patient with him, sitting by him while he took a sandwich and a tumbler of claret; soothing him in his indignation against Lady Valeria; listening to his remorseful confession of wrong-doing in the past; bearing with that most tedious of all human creatures, an unhappy lover. But she had a sense of relief when he was gone, and she heard the dog-cart wheels rolling along the avenue. Her thoughts of late had been so concentrated upon her husband and his suffering that it was painful to be obliged to think of anything outside that sick-room and its sadness.

Bothwell found only disappointment at Plymouth. The little maid-servant had been thoroughly coached by Mdlle. Duprez before she left, and had been warned against any mention of Miss Heathcote.

She faced Bothwell with a stolid countenance, prepared to commit any enormity in the way of false statements; for she was one of those faithful creatures who, although the soul of truthfulness upon their own account, will lie valiantly to serve those they love. She said that Mdlle. Duprez had gone away on business.

"Was she alone?" asked Bothwell.

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"But she was to meet some one at the station, perhaps. There was some one going away from Plymouth with her."

"I think not, sir. I feel sure Mdlle. Duprez would have told me if there had been any one going with her."

"When was Miss Heathcote last here?" asked Bothwell abruptly. "You know Miss Heathcote—a pupil—a young lady from Bodmin?"

The girl put on a countenance of profound thought, as if she were calling upon her memory for a stupendous effort, looking back into the night of ages.

"I'm sure I can't say, sir; but it was a long time ago—quite early in the summer."

"You are sure she was not here yesterday?"

"O yes, sir. Mademoiselle left Plymouth a week ago, and nobody called yesterday."

"O, she left Plymouth a week ago, did she, and

nobody called yesterday?" repeated Bothwell, with a despairing helplessness which smote the slavey's heart.

It seemed a cruel thing to deceive such a nice-looking, outspoken gentleman—about his young lady, too—for it was evident to Mary Jane that Miss Heathcote must have been keeping company with this gentleman, and that she had broken off with him. If Mary Jane's fidelity to the little Frenchwoman had not been firm as a rock, she would have given way at this point, and told Bothwell the truth.

"Kindly give me Mdlle. Duprez's address," he said. "I have very important business with her, and should like to telegraph immediately."

"Mademoiselle did not leave any address, sir."

"Not leave any address? A woman of business! But she would have her letters sent after her, surely," urged Bothwell.

"No, sir. She did not wish her letters to be sent. She would be on the move, she said; and she would rather risk leaving the letters here than having them follow her from place to place."

There was an air of reality about these particulars that convinced Bothwell, whereby he showed his inexperience; for liars always go into particulars, and prop up their falsehoods with a richness of detail that is rare in truthful statements.

"Then you really don't know where Mdlle. Duprez is to be found?"

"No, sir; but I am expecting her home at any moment. She might walk in while we are standing here."

"I wish she would," said Bothwell. "I want much to see her."

He left his card, and went away, cruelly disappointed.

And now he set his teeth, like a man who is going to meet his foe, as he turned his face towards that white-walled villa on one of the hills above the town, that fair and pleasant place where he had dawdled away so many summer afternoons, all the while wishing himself anywhere rather than in that Armida garden, feeling himself a knave and a dastard for being there. He hated the place now with a deadly hatred. It seemed to him that those white

walls had been built of dead men's bones, as if the house within and without savoured of the charnel.

The good old man, so fooled, so wronged by a false wife and false friend, was gone, lying at rest in the cemetery yonder, and Armida reigned alone in her enchanted garden.

Bothwell walked to Fox Hill at his fastest pace, hurrying on with bent brow, unobservant of anybody or anything that he passed on his way, as if he would walk down the angry devil within him. But the devil was not subjugated when Bothwell entered the classic portico. His livid countenance, his gloomy eyes scared the sleek young footman from his after-dinner listlessness.

Yes, Lady Valeria was at home. Bothwell was ushered into the shadowy drawing-room—a place of summer darkness, sea-green plush and tawny satin, an atmosphere of perfume. The verandah beyond the richly-curtained windows was filled with exotics; creamy-white blossoms were languishing in venetian vases on tables and piano. A Japanese embroidered curtain draped the door of an inner room, and, as

Bothwell entered, this curtain was lifted by those slender fingers he knew so well, and Valeria stood before him, very pale, seeming taller and slimmer than of old, in her black cashmere gown. She wore no crape to-day, only that plain cashmere, silkily soft, of densest, most funereal black, falling in straight folds from the graceful shoulders, clasped at the throat with a large jet cross, the thin white arms showing like marble under the long loose sleeves, which fell open from above the elbow. The flowing draperies had a conventual air, as of an abbess of some severe order; but the uncovered head, with its coils of soft brown hair, was like the head of a Greek statue.

Bothwell uttered no word of greeting. He took Hilda's letter from his breast-pocket, and handed it open to Lady Valeria.

"This is your work," he said.

She read the letter slowly, deliberately, and not a sign of emotion stirred the marble pallor of her face as she read. She seemed to weigh every syllable.

"A very sensible little letter," she said. "I

did not think it was in Miss Heathcote to take so broad and generous a view of our position. She is a noble girl, and I shall honour her all the days of my life. She has cut the knot of a great difficulty."

Bothwell looked at her incredulously, as if he doubted his own ears.

"Do you suppose that I shall abide by this letter?" he asked, in harsh husky tones, which made his voice seem altogether unfamiliar to Valeria, as if a stranger were speaking to her in Bothwell's semblance.

"Naturally, my poor Bothwell," she answered, with her easiest air. "I cannot think that your engagement to this very good commonplace girl was anything more than a *pis aller*. You were afraid of your position here, and it seemed to you that the only safety was in a respectable marriage. The young lady has a little money, I understand, just enough to keep the wolf from the door, but not enough for any of the delights of life. And you told yourself that you would do penance for those happy days up at the hills, that you—you, Bothwell Gra-

hame—would settle down into a grinder of mathematics. A curious fancy—like that of some knight of old who, after a youth of passion and storm, turns hermit, and vegetates in a cave. No, Bothwell, I do not for a moment believe that you ever seriously cared for this country-bred girl."

"Your estimate of my feelings in this matter can be of very little consequence to either of us," replied Bothwell, without relaxing a muscle of his moody countenance. "It is Miss Heathcote I mean to marry, and no other woman living. You have stooped so low as to come between me and my plighted wife. You have put off my marriage, hindered my happiness, frustrated the desire of my heart; but nothing that you or any one else can do will lessen my love for the girl I have chosen. If I cannot win her back, I shall go down to my grave a broken-hearted man. This is what you have done for me, Lady Valeria."

She was silent for some moments, while she stood looking at him with her pale fixed face, her large violet eyes full of reproachfulness.

"This is what I have done for you," she said

slowly, after a long pause: "This is what I have done for you. I have tried to secure to you a life of independence, wealth, the respect of your fellow-men, who in these days have but one standard of merit—success. I have flung myself at your feet, with all the advantages of my birth and fortune—friends who could help you—an assured position; I have offered myself to you as humbly as an Indian dancing-girl, have debased myself as low, made as little of my merits and my position. And all I have asked of you is to keep the solemn vows you made to me in that sweet time when we were both so happy. I have asked you to be true to your word."

"After you had released me from its obligations, Lady Valeria, after you had flung away the old love-token. Was not that an end of all things between us?"

"It might have been. I accepted my doom. And then Fate changed all things. I was free, and there was nothing to hinder our happiness, except your falsehood—your double falsehood. You were false to your truest friend, my husband, when you loved

me; and now that you could love me with honour you are false to me."

"I am as God made me," answered Bothwell gloomily, "weak and false in the days gone by, when my love for you was stronger with me than gratitude or honour, but loyal and true to the girl who won me away from that false love. Shall I go back to the old love now because it is my interest to do so? O Valeria, how you would despise me! how all good and true women would scorn me if I could be base enough to be false to that dear engagement which redeemed me from a false position, which set me right in my own esteem and before my fellow-men! Granted that I have been weak and inconstant, that I have proved myself unworthy of the regard with which you honoured me," he went on, with a touch of tenderness in the voice that had been so hard just now, moved to compassion perhaps by that pale, despairing look of hers, "granted that I am a poor creature, you can hardly wonder that my soul sickened at a tie which involved blackest treason against a good man, and my best friend; you can hardly wonder that I welcomed the dawning of a

new love, a love which I could confess before the world, and on my knees to my God. That love meant redemption, blessing instead of cursing. And do you suppose that I am afraid of poverty, or hard work, or a life of obscurity, for the sake of my true love?"

"You have not changed your mind, then?" said Valeria, trying to be supremely cool, though the hectic spot upon that ashen cheek told of passionate anger. "You mean to marry Miss Heathcote, and teach dull lads in a Cornish village for the rest of your life?"

"With God's help I mean to win back the girl from whom you have parted me. I came here this afternoon to tell you that your work has been only half successful. You have hindered my marriage, but you have not changed the purpose of my life. Farewell, Valeria, and I pray God that word between you and me may mean for ever."

"Farewell," she answered mockingly. "Fare according to your deserts, truest, most generous of men."

She put her finger on the little ivory knob of the

electric bell, and the sustained silvery sound vibrated in the silent house. Then, with a haughty inclination of her head, she disappeared through the curtained archway as Bothwell left the room by the opposite door.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE WHO MUST REMEMBER.

Edward Heathcote had been away from Paris when Miss Meyerstein's telegram arrived at the Hôtel de Bade. He had gone on a journey of something over a hundred miles on the Western Railway, a journey undertaken with the idea of adding one more link to the chain which he had been slowly putting together; one more chapter in the history of Marie Prévol.

He had been disappointed in those who were to have helped him in his task; and it was to his own patience and resources that he was for the most part indebted for such progress as he had made. Drubarde, the ex-police-officer, had been able to do no more than to supply the formal record of the evidence before the *Juge d'Instruction*. He could throw no light upon the previous history of the supposed murderer: he could offer no clue to his subsequent fate.

Sigismond Trottier, from whose keen wit Heathcote had hoped for such valuable aid, had broken down altogether. He had failed to furnish any further reminiscences of his old acquaintance Georges.

"I want to know what the man was like," said Heathcote, at their last interview. "If you could put me into communication with any artist friend of yours who knew Georges well, and can remember him well enough to give me his likeness from memory—were it the slightest sketch—I would pay your friend liberally for his work, and be very grateful to you for bringing the matter about."

"I know no such man," answered Trottier curtly.

"That is very strange. Surely there must be some such person among those who can remember Georges. You say that his only friends were of the literary and artistic world."

"*Nom d'un nom*," exclaimed Trottier impatiently, "I suppose I had better be frank with you. Yes, it is quite possible there may be some one who knew

Georges, and who could give you such a sketch as you want. But I will not help you to find that person. I liked Georges—liked him well, mark you. I have profited by his generosity, have gone to him for help when I was in very low water. I am not going to turn and sting my benefactor. Granted that he was an assassin. I can find excuses even for that crime, for I know how he loved Marie Prévol. I am not going to help you to hunt him down. If he is alive and has repented his sin, let him alone, to be dealt with by his Creator and his Judge. What are we that we should pretend to condemn or to punish him?"

"I have sworn to myself to find the last link in the chain."

"Why should you want to hunt this man down?"

"That is my secret. I have a motive, and a very powerful one. It may be that I have no intention to betray the wretch to justice; that when the tangled skein shall be unravelled, and the mystery of that man's life made clear, that in the hour of success I may be merciful, may hold my hand, and

keep the murderer's secret from the outside world. But I want to know that secret, I want to be able to stand face to face with that man and to say, 'You are the murderer of Marie Prévol and her lover; you are the murderer of the helpless girl who went alone to England, having in her possession certain papers which threw too strong a light upon your guilty past. You, who have held your head erect before the world, and have passed for a man of honour and probity, you are the remorseless villain whose life stands twice forfeited to the law.'"

Heathcote was pacing up and down the room, intensely agitated. He had abandoned himself wholly to the passion of the moment, forgetful of Trottier's presence, forgetful of all things except that one fixed purpose of his mind which had become almost monomania.

"What would you gain by this?" asked Trottier, wondering at this new aspect of his English friend.

"Revenge! There is enough of the old Adam left in the best of us to make revenge sweet. What must it be to a man who has lost the one delight that made life worth living?"

"I cannot help you to your revenge," answered Trottier. "I was fond of Georges. I hope you may never be able to look in his face and accuse him of the past. I hope he may be spared that shame. I cannot for the life of me understand why you should pursue a stranger with such deadly hatred."

"That is my secret, I say again. If you will not help me, so be it. I must go on working on my own account. But the face—the face—that is, perhaps, the only identification possible. The links of the chain fall into their places—the facts that I have slowly gathered all point to one conclusion; but absolute identification is impossible until I can find a portrait of the man who called himself Georges."

"You are not offended with me, I hope?"

"No, Trottier, I understand your refusal; I respect your loyalty to an old friend. But I must get the portrait I want, somehow, without your help."

Thus ended all hope of aid from Sigismond Trottier. Drubarde, on the other hand, had assured

his client that he saw no new clue to the discovery of the missing murderer. If that murderer were indeed identical with the man who met Léonie Lemarque at Charing Cross, if he had surpassed himself in crime by the murder of that helpless girl, it was for the English police to hunt him down. With such a man as Joseph Distin to inspire their movements, the English police—making due allowance for the dulness of a *rosbif*-eating nation—ought to work wonders; and here was a case which offered the chances of distinction; here was an assassin going about red-handed, as it were, after a murder not three months old.

"You expect me to find the murderer of Marie Prévol, a man who escaped us ten years ago; and here are your pampered and over-paid English detectives who cannot find the man who threw Léonie Lemarque out of a railway-carriage last July. Is that common sense, do you think, Mr. Heathcote? No, sir; in Paris I am on my own ground. I know this great city from cellar to garret—her bridges, her suburbs, her quarries, her sewers, and caverns, and waste places, all the holes and crannies where

crime and vice have hidden for the last forty years; but from the moment your criminal has got to the other side of the Channel, I wash my hands of him. My talents can serve you no further."

Mr. Heathcote recompensed the police-officer handsomely for the very little he had done; and so they parted, M. Drubarde vastly pleased with his client, but still better pleased with himself. He was a man whose benign consciousness of his own value in the social scale mellowed with advancing years.

Having been thus abandoned by both his gifted coadjutors, Edward Heathcote worked on by his own lights. There was one person, he told himself, who might be able to assist him—one person whose chief desire in life must be to see the murderer of Marie Prévol and her lover brought to his doom. Among the few scraps of information which Trottier had given to his friend there was the fact that the dowager Baronne de Maucroix, the widowed mother of the murdered man, was still living. She resided at her château in Normandy, where she led a life of strictest seclusion, devoting herself to acts of charity and to the severest religious exercises.

It was in the hope of obtaining an interview with this lady that Heathcote left Paris upon the very morning on which Miss Meyerstein telegraphed the news of Hilda's flight. He had no letter of introduction, no credentials to offer to Mdme. de Maucroix, except the one fact of his keen interest in the after-fate of her son's murderer. There was some audacity in the idea of so presenting himself before a venerable recluse of ancient family, a woman who, according to Sigismond Trottier, had been distinguished in her youth for pride and exclusiveness; a woman who had ranked herself with the Condés and the Mortemarts, who had ignored the house of Orleans, and loathed the Imperial rule.

The château of the Maucroix family was about five miles on the eastward side of Rouen. It was situate on low ground, a little way from the banks of the Seine—an imposing pile of Gothic architecture, guarded by a moat, and approached by an avenue of funereal yews. The surrounding landscape was flat and uninteresting. The broad bright river, winding in bold curves across the level meads, with here and

there a willowy islet, gave a certain charm to scenery which would otherwise have been without a redeeming feature. Far off in the distance the chimney-shafts and spires of Rouen rose dark against the gray October sky.

Edward Heathcote felt the depressing influence of those level fields, the gloom of that dark avenue and sunless day. It seemed to him as if he were going into a grave, a place whence life and hope had fled for ever.

He crossed the low stone bridge which spanned the moat, and found himself in an old-fashioned garden of that stately period which gave grandeur to the fountains and parterres of Versailles. Here, too, there were large marble basins, Tritons and Nereids: but the fountains were not playing; there was no pleasant plashing of silvery water-drops to break the dreary stillness of that deserted garden. Everything was in perfect order, not a withered leaf upon the velvet lawns or the smooth gravel paths. But even amidst this neatness there was a neglected look. No flowers brightened the dark borders. There were only the gloomy evergreens

of a century's growth, some of them pyramids of dark foliage, others cut into fantastic shapes, an artistic development of the gardeners of the past, which had been carefully preserved by the gardeners of the present.

A white-haired *maître d'hôtel* came out into the echoing hall to answer the stranger's inquiries.

"Madame la Baronne is at home," he replied stiffly. "Madame rarely goes out of doors, except to her church, or, under peculiar circumstances, to her poor. Madame la Baronne receives no one except her priest."

"I hope that Madame will make another exception in my favour," said Heathcote quietly. "Be good enough to take her that letter."

He had written to Mdme. de Maucroix before leaving Paris, and he hoped that this letter would serve him as an "open sesame."

"Madame,—For particular reasons of my own, I am keenly desirous to trace the murderer of your son; and, believing myself to be already on the right track, I venture to entreat the favour of an

interview. I am an Englishman of good birth and education, and I shall know how to respect any confidence with which you may honour me. Accept, Madame, the assurance of my high consideration, EDWARD HEATHCOTE.

"To the Baroness de Maucroix."

Heathcote was shown into a room leading out of the hall, the first of a suite of rooms opening one into another in a remote perspective. The doors were open, and the visitor could see to the end of the vista. The parquetted floors, with the cold light reflected on their polished surface from the high narrow windows, the sculptured pediments above the doors, the crystal girandoles, the sombre-looking pictures—all had an old-world air, and gave the idea of a house which strangers visited now and then as a monument of the past, but which had long been empty of domestic life and warmth and comfort. The far-off echo of his own footsteps startled Heathcote as he slowly paced the polished floor.

He had not long to wait. The *maître d'hôtel*

appeared after about ten minutes' interval, evidently astonished at the result of his mission, and informed Heathcote that the Baroness would see him.

"Mdme. la Baronne is old and in weak health, Monsieur," said the servant, who had grown gray in the service of his mistress, and who worshipped her. "I hope your business with her is not of an agitating kind. She seemed much troubled by your letter. A violent shock might kill her."

"There will be no violent shock, my friend," replied Heathcote kindly. "I shall be obliged to talk to Mdme. la Baronne of painful memories, but I shall be careful of her feelings."

"I hope Monsieur will pardon me for making the suggestion."

"With all my heart."

The old servant led the way up the wide semicircular staircase to a corridor above, and to a suite of rooms over those which Heathcote had seen below. They passed through an anteroom, and then entered by a curtained doorway which led into Mdme. de Maucroix's sitting-room, the only room

which she had occupied for the last ten years. The *salons* and music-rooms, the library and card-room on the lower floor, had remained empty and desolate since her son's death. Her bedchamber and dressing-room were situated behind this small *salon*, and another door opened into the suite of apartments which had been occupied by her son. These she visited and inspected daily. They were kept in the order in which he had left them, on his last journey to Paris. Not an object, however trifling, had been changed.

There were logs burning on the hearth, although the first chill winds of autumn had not yet been felt: but the Baroness kept a fire in her room all the year round. The cheery blaze and a large black poodle of almost super-canine intelligence were her only companions. On an exquisite little buhl table by her armchair lay her missal and her *Imitation of Christ*. These two books were her only literature.

The poodle advanced slowly across the Persian carpet to meet the visitor, and made a deliberate inspection. The result was satisfactory, for he gave

three or four solemn swings of his leonine tail, and then composed himself in a dignified position in front of the fire.

The Baroness, who was seated in a deep and spacious armchair, acknowledged Heathcote's entrance only by a dignified bend of her head. She was a woman of remarkable appearance even in the sixty-seventh year of her age. She possessed that classic beauty of feature which time cannot take away. No matter that the pale pure skin was faded from its youthful bloom, that the lines of care and thought were drawn deeply upon the broad brow and about the melancholy mouth: the outline of the face was such as a sculptor would have chosen for a Hecuba or a Dido.

She was above the average height of women, and sat erect in her high-backed chair with a majestic air which impressed Edward Heathcote. Her plainly fashioned black silk gown and India muslin fichu recalled Delaroche's famous picture of Marie Antoinette, and her cast of countenance in some wise resembled that of the martyred queen; but the features were more perfect in their harmony, the

outline was more statuesque. In a word, the Baroness had been lovelier than the Queen.

She motioned Heathcotè to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

"You are interested in tracing the murderer of my son," she said. "That is strange—after ten years—and you an Englishman! What concern can you have in the fate of that man?"

There was the faintest quiver in her voice as she spoke of her son, otherwise her tones were clear and self-possessed; her large dark eyes contemplated the stranger with calmest scrutiny.

"That is in some wise my secret, Madame," replied Heathcote. "I will be as frank with you as I can; but there are motives which I must keep to myself until this investigation of mine has come to an end—until I can tell you that I have found the murderer of Marie Prévol, that I have proof positive of his guilt."

"And then, Monsieur—what then?" asked the Baroness.

"Madame, it is perhaps you who should be the arbiter of the murderer's fate; in the event of such

evidence as may be conclusive to you and me being also strong enough to insure his conviction by a French jury. French jurymen are so merciful, Madame, and your judges so full of sentiment. They would perhaps regard the death of those two young people—slain in the flower of their youth—as an outbreak of jealous feeling for which the murderer was to be pitied rather than punished. The law is always kind to the shedders of blood. It is the child who steals a loaf, or the journalist who by some carelessly edited paragraph wounds the fine feelings of our aristocracy—it is for such as these there is no mercy. But in the event of my being able to find the assassin, and to furnish conclusive evidence of his guilt, what would be your line of conduct, Madame?"

The Dowager was slow to reply. She waited with fixed brows, meditative, absorbed, for some moments.

"There was a time," she said at last, "when I should have been quick to reply to such a question—when I thirsted for the blood of my son's murderer. Yes, when my parched lips longed to drink that

blood, as the savage laps the life-stream of his foe. But years have worked their chastening influence —years given up to religious exercises, mark you, Monsieur, not wasted upon the frivolities of this world. I have sought for consolation from no carnal sources. Pleasure has never crossed the threshold of my dwelling since my son's corpse was carried in at my door. Some people try to forget their griefs; they steep themselves in the banalities of this life; they stifle memory amidst the intoxications of a frivolous existence. I am not one of those. I have nursed my sorrow, lived with it, lived upon it, until looking back it seems to me that even in these long slow years of mourning I have not been actually separated from my dead son. In my prayers, in my thoughts, in my waking and sleeping, his image has been ever present, the most precious part of my existence. I believe that he is in heaven, that such prayers as have been breathed for him, together with the services of the Church, must have shortened his time of purgation, that his purified soul is at rest in the blessed home where I hope some day to rejoin him. Confession, penance, mortifications of

all kinds have subjugated the natural evil in my character. My cry for vengeance has long been dumb. If that cruel murderer yet lives, I hope that he may be brought by suffering to repentance. I do not hunger for his death."

There was such an air of lofty feeling, such absolute truth in the tone and manner of Madame de Maucroix, that Heathcote could but admire and respect this cold serenity of grief.

"He has brought my gray hairs in sorrow to the grave," said the Baroness softly, "but I have been taught to pity all sinners, as our Saviour pitied the worst and vilest, with inexhaustible compassion."

"Madame, if you who so loved your son can be merciful, there is no one living who has a right to exact the murderer's blood. And now forgive me if I venture to question you about that sad story. For some time past I have devoted myself to this case. I have slowly put together the links of a chain of evidence, until there is but little wanting to complete the circle. Your knowledge may furnish me with those missing links. Tell me in the first place whether you believe—and have always believed—

that the man called Georges was the murderer of your son."

"I have never doubted his guilt. There was no one else; no one whom my boy had ever offended. Remember, Monsieur, he was but three-and-twenty years of age, amiable, generous, accomplished, beloved by all who knew him. He had not an enemy, except the man whose jealousy he had aroused."

"Did he know the man Georges?"

"Unhappily, yes. Had he never known Georges he would never have fallen in love with Mdlle. Prévol. Georges was an intimate friend of an artist whom my son patronised; a remarkably clever painter, who twelve or thirteen years ago promised to become famous, but who never fulfilled that promise. Maxime sat to this M. Tillet for a half-length portrait—the man had a genius for portraits—and Tillet introduced him to the Bohemian circle in which Georges was living. It was a very small circle, consisting of about a dozen men in all, mostly journalists and painters. Georges appeared to have a liking for my son; Maxime's youth and freshness interested him; he said, in a world where everybody was *blasé*.

He invited him to little suppers of three or four intimates, at which Marie Prévol was present. From that hour my son's head was turned. He fell passionately in love with this actress. He thought of her by day and night, abandoned himself utterly to his idolatry, desired ardently to make her his wife."

"He did not believe that she was married to Georges ?"

"That was his difficulty. In his love and reverence for her he could not endure to think of her as in a degraded position ; yet if she were already a wife, Maxime could never hope to win her. In his mad, headstrong love he was ready to forgive her past career, to redeem her from her degraded position, and make her the Baroness de Maucroix. He, who had been educated in the pride of race as in the gospel, was willing to marry an actress with a tarnished character !"

"Did he make you the confidante of his passion, Madame ?"

"For some time he kept his secret from me ; but I knew that he was unhappy, and I knew that there was only one kind of grief possible in such a life as

his, where nature and fortune had been alike lavish. He had been my companion and adviser from the day of my widowhood; and we were nearer and dearer to each other, and more in each other's confidence, than mothers and sons usually are. More than once I had entreated him to tell me the nature of his trouble, to let me help him, if that were possible; and he had told me that there was no one who could help him in the great crisis of his life. 'I must be either the happiest or the most miserable of men,' he said. One night I went into his room and found him ill, feverish, in a half-delirious state, raving about Marie Prévol. This broke the ice, and during the briéf illness that followed—the effect of cold, fatigue, excitement, and late hours—I obtained his confidence. He told me the whole story of his love for this beautiful actress; how at their first meeting he had been enslaved by her exquisite loveliness, her indescribable charm of manner. He protested that her nature was purity itself, despite her false position. She was the victim of circumstances. And then he told me that Georges spoke of her as his wife, treated her with a respect rarely

shown to women of light character; and this thought that his idol was another man's wife filled my unhappy son with despair."

"You warned him of the danger of his position, no doubt, Madame."

"Not once only, but again and again. With all the fervour of a mother's prayers did I implore him to escape from this fatal entanglement. I urged him to travel, to go to Spain, Italy, Africa—Algiers was at that time a favourite resort for men of fashion—anywhere so long as he withdrew himself from the fascination which could end only in ruin. But it was in vain that I pleaded. Passion was stronger than common sense, duty, or religion. He was caught on a wheel from which he would not even try to extricate himself."

"And your affection could do nothing."

"Nothing. From that time my son was lost to me. He shrank from confiding in me, not because I had been severe—never had I breathed one uncharitable word against the woman he loved. His love made her sacred to me; but I had spoken the words of common sense. I had tried to stand between him

and his own folly. That was enough. He loved his madness better than he loved me—he who had been until that time almost an adoring son. When the time came for us to come here for the autumn he refused to leave Paris, and I was too anxious to allow him to remain there alone. I stayed at our house in the Rue de l'Université, where my son had his apartments, his private keys and private staircase, by which he could come in at any hour, without his movements being known to the household. I hardly know how he lived or what he did during those long days of July and August, while all our circle of acquaintance were away by the sea or in the mountains, and while we seemed to be alone in a deserted city. Several of the theatres were closed during those months; but the Porte-Saint-Martin had made a great success with a fairy piece, and kept open for the strangers who filled Paris.

"I believe that my son went every night to the theatre, that he saw Marie Prévol at every opportunity, and that his only motive in life was his love for her. For me the days went by in dull monotony. A presentiment of evil oppressed me, waking or

sleeping. Long before the coming of calamity I felt the agony of an inevitable grief. I knew not what form my misery would take; but I knew that my boy was doomed. When they brought home his bleeding corpse in the summer evening, four-and-twenty hours after the murder, I met the messengers of evil as one prepared for the worst. I had lost him long before his death."

She spoke with infinite composure. She had familiarised herself with her sorrow, lived with it, cherished it, until grief had lost its power to agitate. Not a tone faltered as she spoke of that tragical past. Her countenance was as calm as marble. Every line in the noble face spoke of a settled sorrow, every line had become unalterable as the lines of a statue.

"You say, Madame, that the painter Tillet was upon intimate terms with Georges," said Heathcote. "Is this M. Tillet still living?"

"I believe so. I never heard of his death. He has clever sons whose names are before the public. I have heard people mention them, though I have never seen their works. My knowledge of secular art and literature ceased ten years ago."

"I should be glad to find M. Tillet," said Heathcote. "He is the very man I want to discover—a man whose pencil could recall for me the face of the missing Georges. You say, Madame, that he was an intimate friend of Georges, and that he was a clever portrait-painter. Such a man would not have forgotten his friend's face."

"If you knew what Georges was like, do you suppose you could find him?" asked the Baroness, without eagerness, but with a grave intensity, which accentuated the severe lines of her countenance.

"Yes," replied Heathcote. "I believe that in four-and-twenty hours I could lay my hand on the assassin's shoulder and say, 'Thou art the man.'"

"In four-and-twenty hours? There is a distance, then, between you. The man you suspect is not in Paris."

"No, he is not in Paris."

"And if, by means of M. Tillet's art, you are able to assure yourself of his identity, how will you deal with him? Would you deliver him up to justice?"

"Ah, Madame, who knows? Our great poet

has said that there is a divinity which shapes our ends—not as we have planned them. If the assassin of your son is the person I believe him to be, he is already punished. He is a doomed man. Joy and hope and comfort are dead for him. The criminal court and the guillotine could be no harder ordeal than the suffering of his daily life. If he is guilty, Heaven has not been blind to his sin. The Eternal Doomsman has pronounced his sentence."

A faint flush illuminated the settled pallor of Mdme. de Maucroix's countenance, a light sparkled in her eyes.

"I knew that he would not escape," she said, in a low voice. "Heaven is just."

"If you will kindly give me M. Tillet's address, Madame, I shall be deeply obliged."

"I can only tell you an address of ten years ago. M. Tillet lived at that time in the Rue Saint-Guillaume. He was then in the flush of success, and I have heard my son say that he had a handsome apartment. Where he may live now in his decadence I know not. But his sons are known, and you will have no difficulty in getting information."

"I apprehend not, Madame. And now, if you will permit me, I would ask one more question."

"As many as you please, Monsieur."

"Have you in your possession any scrap of Georges' writing—any note, however brief?"

"No. There was no such thing found among my boy's effects. The police requested that such a letter or letters should be looked for. They, too, were anxious to procure a specimen of the suspected man's writing; but, although I looked most carefully through all my son's papers, I discovered no such letter. There were two or three notes from Tillet conveying invitations from Georges, but there was no direct communication from the man himself."

"He was doubtless a man who had taken the old saying to heart," said Heathcote. "'*Litera scripta manet.*' I have to thank you, Madame, for your gracious reception, and, above all, for your candour."

"In a life like mine, Monsieur, there is no room for untruthfulness or hypocrisy. My existence moves in too narrow a circle. I have no interest

outside my son's grave, and my own hope of salvation. Perhaps, before you leave this house, you would like to see the apartments in which Maxime lived. They have been kept just as he left them when he went back to Paris for the last time after the shooting-season."

"I should like much to see them," said Heathcote, standing hat in hand before the Baroness.

It seemed to him that she had a melancholy pleasure in dwelling on the image of her murdered son; that it would gratify her to show the rooms which he had inhabited, even to a stranger.

The Baroness rose, a tall erect figure, dignified and graceful in advancing age as she had been in the bloom of her beauty, when Louis Philippe was king. She moved with stately steps towards the door at the end of her *salon*, and led the way into the adjoining room.

It was a large room, richly furnished, and full of such luxuries as a young man loves. Dwarf bookcases lined the four walls. On one side, above the array of richly-bound volumes, appeared a costly collection of arms, both modern and antique. The

fireplace was a kind of alcove, furnished with luxurious seats, upholstered in copper-red velvet. Old tapestry, old miniatures, bronzes, curios of all kinds filled the room with endless varieties of form and colour. A tapestry curtain screened the door of the adjoining bedchamber. The Baroness drew aside the heavy tapestry with her wasted hand, and led the stranger into the room where her son had slept through so many peaceful nights in his happy youth.

A carved ivory crucifix of large size, a *chef-d'œuvre*, yellow with age, hung over the pillow on which that young head had so often slumbered. The attenuated form of the Redeemer showed in sharp relief against the olive-velvet draperies of the bed. Heathcote observed that the Persian rug beside the bed was worn in the centre, as if with much use, and he could guess whose knees had left the trace of prayerful hours upon the fabric, as he saw the eyes of the Dowager fixed upon that pallid figure of her martyred Saviour.

"I have lived half my days for the last ten years in this room," she said quietly. "I hope to die

here. If I have sense and knowledge left me, I shall creep here when I feel that my end is near."

Over the mantelpiece hung Maxime de Maucroix's portrait, the picture of a bright young face, perfect in form and colouring, but most beautiful by reason of the hope and gladness that shone in the sunny eyes, the frank clear outlook of an untainted soul. Heathcote could understand the fascination exercised over a woman like Marie Prévol by such a man as this, with all the adjuncts of rank, talent, wealth, and fashion.

They went back to the Baroness's *salon*, and Heathcote took his leave, to return to Rouen, where he stayed the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST LINK.

HEATHCOTE returned to Paris on the morning after his interview with the Baronne, and found Miss Meyerstein's telegram, and with it Hilda's long and explanatory letter. The girl expressed herself so temperately, with such firm resolve, such generous feeling, that her brother could not find it in his heart to be angry with her for what she had done. He had never desired her marriage with Bothwell Grahame; he desired it least of all now. Wedding-bells would have been indeed out of tune with the dark purpose for which he was working. He had yielded at Dora Wyllard's entreaty; he had yielded because his sister's happiness had seemed to be at stake. But now that she had of her own accord

relinquished her lover, he was not inclined to interfere with her decision.

Nor was he alarmed at Miss Meyerstein's telegram, informing him of Hilda's departure in the early morning. His faith in his sister's common sense and earnestness was of the strongest. The tone of her letter was not that of a girl who was bent upon any perilous course of action. He felt assured that she would do nothing to bring discredit upon her name or her family; and that if it pleased her to disappear for a little while, so as to give her lover the opportunity of jilting her in a gentleman-like manner, she might be safely intrusted with the management of her own life.

She was well provided with money, having the cheque which her brother had sent her a few days before her flight. There was therefore no ground for uneasiness at the idea of her helplessness among strangers. A girl of nineteen, sensibly brought up, with strong self-respect, and two hundred and fifty pounds in her possession, could hardly come to grief anywhere.

"I wish she had taken her maid with her,"

thought Heathcote, and this was almost his only regret in the matter.

For not a moment did he doubt that Bothwell would take advantage of his recovered liberty, and go back to his old love. Hilda had dwelt in her letter upon Lady Valeria's grace and distinction, her fortune, and the position to which she could raise her husband. Edward Heathcote did not give Bothwell credit for the strength of mind which could resist such temptations. A weak, yielding nature, a man open to the nearest influence. That was how he judged Bothwell Grahame.

He remembered the young man's conduct at the inquest, his resolute refusal to say what he had done with his time in Plymouth, rather than bring Lady Valeria's name before the public. That dogged loyalty had argued a guilty love; and could Heathcote doubt that when called upon to choose between the old love, and all its surrounding advantages, and the new love, with its very modest expectations, Bothwell would gladly return to his first allegiance?

Assured of this, Heathcote was content that his

sister should live down her sorrow after her own fashion. Better, he thought, that she should take her own way of bearing her trouble; just as he himself had done in the days long gone, when the light of his life had been suddenly extinguished. It was not in sluggish repose that he had sought the cure for his grief, but in work, and in movement from place to place. He remembered Hilda's often-expressed desire to study at one of the great musical academies of the Continent; and he thought it very likely she had gone to Florence or Milan. He had seen Mdlle. Duprez and Hilda putting their heads together, had heard the little woman protest that such a voice as Hilda's ought to be trained under an Italian sky. He could read some such purpose as this between the lines of his sister's letter. This being so, he was content to let things take their course; more especially as his own mind was full of another subject, and his own life was devoted to another purpose than running after a fugitive sister. He wrote a reassuring letter to poor Miss Meyerstein, and he waited patiently for further tidings from Hilda.

His first business after his return to Paris was to find Eugène Tillet, the portrait-painter. He had noticed the signature of Tillet on some of the illustrations in the *Petit Journal*, and he inquired at the office of that paper for the artist's address, and for other information respecting him. He was told that M. Tillet lived in the Rue du Bac, with his father and mother, and that he was one of a numerous family, all artistic. His father was Eugène Tillet, who had once been a fashionable painter, but who had dropped out of the race, and was now almost entirely dependent on the industry of his sons and daughters.

This made things easy enough, it would seem: but Heathcote remembered his failure with Sigismond Trottier, and he feared that in Eugène Tillet he might perhaps encounter the same loyal regard for an unfortunate friend. Again, Tillet might have been warned by Trottier, and might be on his guard against any act which could betray the assassin whom he had once reckoned amongst his friends.

It was certain that the painter would remember

his friend's face; it was probable that he had some likeness of the missing man in his sketch-book. He was out-at-elbows, idle, a man content to live luxuriously on the labour of others. Such a man would be especially open to pecuniary temptation. He had begun with brilliant successes, had ended in failure and obscurity. Such a man must have suffered all the acutest agonies of wounded vanity, and he would be therefore easily moved by praise.

Arguing thus with himself during his walk to the Rue du Bac, Heathcote arranged his course of action. He would approach M. Tillet as an amateur, a collector of modern art, and would offer to purchase some of his sketches. This would lead naturally to an inspection of old sketch-books, and to confidences of various kinds from the painter.

As a lawyer and a man of the world, Edward Heathcote considered himself quite equal to the occasion.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he rang the bell on the second floor of the house over the glover's. The neat-looking maid-servant who answered his summons informed him that M. Tillet

père was at home. Everybody else was out. The *ci-devant* portrait-painter was smoking the pipe of peace by the family hearth, a human monument of departed ambitions, bright hopes that had melted into darkness, softly and slowly, like the red light of a fusee.

He yawned as he rose to receive his visitor. He stood in front of the hearth, tall, long-limbed, slouching, slovenly, but with a countenance that still showed traces of intellectual power, despite the evident decadence, physical and mental, of the man. His complexion had the unhealthy pallor which indicates a life spent within four walls; and already that pallor was assuming the sickly greenish hue of the absinthe-drinker.

"I have to apologise for intruding upon you without any introduction, M. Tillet," began Heathcote, taking the seat to which the painter motioned him; "but although I have neither card nor letter, I do not come to you entirely as a stranger. I was yesterday with the Baronne de Maucroix, a lady whom you must remember, as her son was once your friend."

"Mdme. de Maucroix, poor soul!" muttered the painter. "I am not likely to forget her. I believe that portrait of mine has been of more comfort to her than anything else in the world since her son's unhappy death."

"It is a remarkable portrait," said Heathcote, with enthusiasm.

He was careful to show neither interest nor curiosity about the circumstances of Maucroix's death. He was there in the character of an amateur, interested solely in art.

"It is one of the finest pictures I ever saw," he went on. "Neither Reynolds nor Gainsborough ever painted anything better."

"Monsieur is too good. Your English painters have produced some very fine portraits. There are heads by Gainsborough and Reynolds which leave very little to be desired; though the treatment of the arms and hands is sometimes deplorably flimsy. You others have not the realistic force of the Paris school. Your Millais has a Rubens-like *brio*, but he paints with a butter-knife. Your Leighton has grace, and a keen feeling for beauty, but he is cold

and shadowy. So you saw my portrait of poor Maucroix? Yes, I think it was in my best manner. But it was in the portraiture of women that I was strongest. I have been told by too partial judges that the head over the escritoire yonder is worthy of Titian."

"It is an exquisite piece of colour," answered Heathcote, rising to scrutinise the unfinished Duchess.

"I was a genius when I painted that picture," said Tillet, with a moody look; "but it is all past and done with. I am glad to think you appreciated my portrait of the Baron de Maucroix, a splendid subject, a fine young fellow. May I ask the name of my gracious admirer?"

"My name is Heathcote," said the visitor, laying his card upon the table in front of M. Tillet.

The painter stared at him with a look of extreme surprise.

"Heathcote!" he repeated, and then examined the card.

"You seem surprised at the mention of my

name," said Heathcote. "Have you ever heard it before to-day?"

The painter had recovered himself by this time. He told himself that his visitor was in all probability Hilda's brother, and that it was his duty to his fair young friend to conceal the fact of her residence under that roof.

He was capable of so much perspicuity as this, but he was quite incapable of prompt action. He was too listless to make an excuse for leaving his visitor, in order to put the servant upon her guard, and so prevent Hilda's appearance before Mr. Heathcote's departure. The chances were, thought Tillet, that the Englishman's visit would be brief; while, on the other hand, Hilda had gone to the Conservatoire, and was not likely to return for some time.

Having argued thus with himself, the painter was content to trust to the chapter of accidents, which had been of late years the principal chapter in the history of his life.

"If you don't mind smoke," he murmured, with a longing look at his cigarette-case.

"I am a smoker myself, and I delight in it."

On this, Monsieur Tillet offered his case to the Englishman, and lighted a cigarette for himself.

"Yes, I have heard your name before," he said slowly and reflectively. "I think it must have been from my friend Trottier, Sigismond Trottier, one of the contributors to the *Taon*. He has mentioned an English acquaintance called Heathcote. Perhaps you are that gentleman?"

"Yes, I know Trottier," answered Heathcote, far from pleased at finding that the painter and the paragraphist were intimate.

It was not unlikely that Trottier had warned his friend against answering any inquiries about Georges.

"Then I think you must have heard a good deal about *me*," said Eugène Tillet, with a satisfied smile. "Trottier knew me when I was in the zenith of my power—glorious days—glorious nights those. The days of Gautier and Gustave Planche, Villemessant, Roqueplan—the days when there were wits in Paris, Monsieur. Ah! you should have seen

our after-midnight *cénacle* at the Café Riche. How the pale dawn used to creep in upon our talk! and how we defied the waiters, when, between two and three o'clock, they tried to put out the gas and get rid of us! I remember how, one night, we all came with candle-ends in our pockets, and when the waiters began to lower the gas, lit up our candles—a veritable illumination. They never tried to put out our lamps after that. Yes, those were glorious nights, and art was honoured in those days. There was a man called Georges, a French Canadian, I believe; a man of large fortune and splendid brains—he came to a bad end afterwards, I am sorry to say"—this with airiest indifference. "He used to give little suppers at the Café de Paris or the Maison d'Or, suppers of half a dozen at most—banquets for the gods. I was generally one of that select circle."

"You painted this friend of yours, no doubt," suggested Heathcote, "this Monsieur Georges."

"No; he had a curious antipathy to sitting for his portrait. I wanted to paint him. He had a fine

head, highly paintable. A fine picturesque head, which was all the more picturesque on account of a particularly artistic wig."

"Do you mean to say that he wore a wig?"

"Habitually. He had lost his hair in South America after a severe attack of fever, and it had never grown again. He wore a light auburn wig, with hair that fell loosely and carelessly over his forehead, almost touching his eyebrows. The style suited him to perfection, and the wig was so perfect in its simulation of nature that I doubt if any one but a painter or a woman would have detected that it was a wig. He dressed in a careless semi-picturesque style—turn-down collar, loose necktie, velvet coat—and with that long hair of his, he had altogether the air of a painter or a poet."

"And you never painted him?"

"Never. I have sketched his head many a time from memory, for my own amusement, both before and after his disappearance; but he never sat to me. I might have made money by giving the police one of my sketches, when they were trying to hunt

Georges down as a suspected murderer: but I am not a Judas, to betray the friend at whose table I have eaten," said the painter, whose Scriptural knowledge was derived solely from the Old Masters, and who regarded the disciple's crime from a purely social point of view.

Heathcote was careful to show the least possible curiosity about the vanished Georges. He listened with the air of a man who is charmed by a delightful conversationalist, who admires the *raconteur*, but who has no personal interest in the subject of the discourse. And Eugène Tillet was accustomed so to talk and so to be heard. He was an egotist of the first water, and was not a close observer of other people.

Heathcote was now assured of the one fact which he wanted to know. The painter had made numerous sketches of his friend, and no doubt had some of those sketches still in his possession, as they could have had little value for the dealers. The question now was to get at his sketch-books as quickly as possible.

"The mention of your sketches recalls the object of my visit, which your very delightful conversation had made me almost forget," said Heathcote.

Eugène acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

"I am very anxious to become the possessor of a few of your sketches in black and white, colour, pencil, what you will. There is no kind of art that I love better than those first airy fancies of the painter's mind, those jottings of inspiration. I am the possessor of a few very nice things in that way" —this was strictly true—"sketches by Mulready, Leslie, Maclise, and many other of our English artists. I should much like to add yours to my collection."

Eugène Tillet's sallow cheeks flushed faintly at the compliment. It was very long since any one had offered to buy the work of his brush or his pencil. It was very long since he had touched money of his own earning. And here was an English milord, an enthusiastic simpleton, ready to give him gold and silver for the sweepings of his studio. His pale cheeks flushed, his faded eyes kindled at the

thought. His hands were tremulous as he unlocked a cupboard, and drew forth three or four dusty sketch-books from the place where they had lain for the last ten years, neglected, forgotten, counted as mere lumber.

His hand had long lost its cunning, and, in that slough of despond into which he had gone down, he had lost even the love of his art. It has been said that an artist may lose in a twelvemonth the manipulative power which it has cost him many years to acquire; and it is a certainty that Eugène Tillet's hand could not, for the offer of thousands, have produced anything as good as the worst of the drawings in those half-forgotten sketch-books.

"If we can find anything in these books that you would care to possess," he said, laying the dusty volumes in front of Heathcote. "You had better wait till I get them dusted for you."

But Heathcote was too eager to endure delay. He wiped off some of the dust with his cambric handkerchief, and opened the uppermost volume.

The sketches were full of talent, intensely interesting to any lover of art. They were sketches

over which Edward Heathcote would have lingered long, under other circumstances. As it was, he had considerable difficulty in concealing his impatience, and appearing interested in the book on artistic grounds. He remembered himself so far as to select two pencil sketches of girlish faces before he closed the first volume, which contained no drawing that bore upon the object of his search.

The second was also a blank; but from this Heathcote chose three or four clever caricatures, which the painter cut out at his request.

"You must kindly put down your own price for these things," he said, as he opened the third volume.

On the second page he saw the face he had been looking for, the face he had expected to see. But, although this thing did not come upon him as a surprise; although that pencilled likeness, the last link of the chain, served only to confirm the settled conviction which had gradually taken possession of his mind, the shock was sharp enough to drive the blood from his face, to set his heart beating like a sledgehammer.

It was so, then. It was as he had thought, ever since his conversation with Barbe Leroux. This was the man. This was Marie Prévol's lover, and her murderer. This was the cold-blooded assassin of Léonie Lemarque.

He sat silent, breathless, staring blankly at the face before him: a vigorous pencil-drawing of strongly marked features, eager eyes under drooping hair, a sensitive face, a face alive with passionate feeling. The eyes looked straight at the spectator; the lips seemed as if, in the next instant, they would move in speech. The attitude was careless, hands clasped on the back of a chair, chin resting on the clasped hands, the whole bust full of power and intention. Yes, just so might an ardent thinker, an eloquent speaker have looked at one of those midnight gatherings of wits and romancers. The sketch was evidently an immediate reminiscence, and must have been made when the subject was a vivid image in the artist's mind.

Happily for Heathcote's secret, his agitation entirely escaped Eugène Tillet's notice. The painter was dreamily contemplating the sketches he had just

cut out of his book, and thinking what a great man he had been when he had made them.

"I should like to have this one," said Heathcote, when he had recovered himself, "and this, and this, and this," he added, turning the leaves hastily, and choosing at random, so as to make that first choice less particular.

Monsieur Tillet cut out all that were indicated to him.

"That is the man I was talking to you about," he said, as he laid the portrait of Georges with the rest of the sketches. "It is a wonderful likeness, too, an extraordinary likeness, dashed off at a white heat one morning, after I had been particularly impressed by the charm of his society. He was a man in a thousand, poor devil. A pity that he should have got himself into such a disagreeable scrape later. But he was a fool for running away. He ought to have given himself up and stood his trial."

"Why?"

"Because he would have inevitably been acquitted. You may murder anybody you like in France, if you

can show a sentimental motive for the crime; and this business of poor Georges was entirely a sentimental murder. He would have had the press and the public with him. The verdict would have been 'Not Guilty.' The populace would have cheered him as he left the *Palais de Justice*, the press would have raved about him, and he would have been the rage in Parisian society for a month afterwards."

"But you who knew both the victims; you who had received kindnesses from Maxime de Maucroix —surely you cannot judge that double murder with so much leniency," expostulated Heathcote.

The painter shrugged his shoulders with infinite expression.

"Maxime de Maucroix was a most estimable young man," he said, "but what the devil was he doing in that galley?"

"And now if you will kindly tell me the sum-total of my small purchases, I shall have great pleasure in giving you notes for the amount," said Heathcote, shocked at the Frenchman's cynicism.

Monsieur Tillet handed him his hastily jotted account. The prices he had put upon his sketches

were extremely modest, considering the man's egotism.

The amount came in all to less than a thousand francs, but Heathcote insisted upon making the payment fifteen hundred, an insistence which was infinitely gratifying to fallen genius.

"I shall remember, Monsieur, on my death-bed, that there was an Englishman who appreciated my work when my countrymen had forgotten me," he said, with mingled pathos and dignity. "Allow me to put up the sketches for you. I do not think you will ever regret having bought them."

While Eugène Tillet was searching among the litter of papers, wood-blocks, and Bristol-board upon his son's table, in the hope of finding two stray pieces of cardboard within which to guard his sketches, the door was quickly opened, and two girls came into the room.

The first was Mathilde Tillet, the second was Heathcote's sister.

"Hilda!" he exclaimed.

Hilda stood before him in silence, with drooping head, pale with surprise and embarrassment.

"Somebody told you I was here," she faltered at last.

"Nobody told me," he answered, smiling at her confusion. "I have not even been looking for you, or making inquiries as to your whereabouts. Your letter was so very self-assertive, you seemed so completely mistress of the situation, that I felt it would be folly to interfere with you. As I opposed you when you wanted to marry Bothwell Grahame, it would be very inconsistent of me to oppose your renunciation of him."

Hilda gave a faint sigh. This speech of her brother's was reassuring, but it implied discredit to Bothwell. She would fain have stood up for her true knight, would fain have praised him whom she had forsaken; but she felt it was safer to hold her peace. By and by, when her sacrifice was completed, and when Bothwell Grahame was Lady Valeria's husband, she could afford to defend his character.

"No, my dear child, our meeting is quite accidental. I came here to see Monsieur Tillet's drawings."

"Our young friend is known to you, Monsieur?" inquired Eugène Tillet, who had looked on with some appearance of interest at a conversation of which he did not understand a word.

This Mr. Heathcote was evidently Hilda's brother, of whom Mdlle. Duprez had spoken before she introduced her *protégée* to the family circle.

"Your young friend is my sister, Monsieur," answered Heathcote; "and since she was determined to run away from home, I am glad she fell into such good hands."

"And now you have found her you are going to carry her off, I suppose," said Tillet. "It will be a pity, for I hear that her talents have made a strong impression upon one of the cleverest professors at the Conservatoire, and that she may do great things with her voice if she pursue her studies there. My young people will be in despair at losing her."

"They shall not lose her quite immediately," replied Heathcote, "though if she is bent upon studying at the Conservatoire, I think it would be better for her to have her old governess to look after her in Paris."

"Fräulein Meyerstein!" exclaimed Hilda. "She would worry me out of my life. She would talk about—about—the past." She could not bring herself to mention Bothwell's name just yet. "My only chance of ever being happy again is to forget my old life. There is some possibility of that here, among new faces and new surroundings. And they are all so kind to me here—Madame Tillet is like a mother."

All this was said hurriedly in English, while Monsieur Tillet discreetly occupied himself putting away his sketch-books. Mathilde had withdrawn, and was telling her mother about the unpleasant surprise that had greeted her return.

"How did you come to know these people?" asked Heathcote.

"Mdlle. Duprez brought me here. She has known the Tillets all her life. She will answer to you for their respectability."

"Well, we will think about it. Let me look at you, Hilda. You are not very blooming, my poor child. It does not seem to me that Paris agrees with you over well."

"Paris agrees with me quite as well as any other place," she answered quietly.

He took her hand and led her to the window, and looked thoughtfully into the sad, pale face, with its expression of settled pain. Yes, he knew what that look meant; he had experienced that dull, slow agony of an aching heart. She had surrendered all that was dearest in life, and she must live through the aching sense of loss, live on to days of dull contentment with a sunless lot. He who himself had never learned the lesson of forgetfulness was not inclined to think lightly of his sister's trouble.

"You look very unhappy, Hilda," he said. "I begin to question the wisdom of your conduct. Do you believe that Bothwell really cared more for this audacious widow than for you?"

"He had been devoted to her for years," answered Hilda. "I saw his letters; I saw the evidence of his love under his own hand. He wrote to her as he never wrote to me."

"He was younger in those days," argued Heathcote. "Youngsters are fond of big words."

"Ah, but that first love must be the truest. I never cared for any one till I saw Bothwell; and I know that my first love will be my last."

"I hope not," said Heathcote. "I hope you have acted wisely in your prompt renunciation. There were reasons why I did not care for the match."

"You surely have left off suspecting him," said Hilda, with an indignant look. "You are not mad enough to think that he was concerned in that girl's death!"

"No, Hilda, that suspicion is a thing of the past. And now let us talk seriously. You have set your heart upon pursuing your studies at the Conservatoire?"

"It is my only object in life."

"And you would like to remain in this family?"

"Very much. They are the cleverest, nicest people I ever knew—with the exception of my nearest and dearest, you and Dora—and Bothwell. They are all as kind to me as if I were a daughter of the house. The life suits me exactly. I should like to stay here for a twelvemonth."

"That is a categorical answer," said Heathcote,

"and leaves me no alternative. I will make a few inquiries about Monsieur Tillet and his surroundings, and if the replies are satisfactory you shall stay here. But I shall send Glossop over to look after you and your frocks. It is not right that my sister should be without a personal attendant of some kind."

"I don't want Glossop. If she comes here, she will write to her friends in Cornwall and tell them where I am."

"No, she won't. She will have my instructions before she leaves The Spaniards. She shall send all her Cornish letters through me. And now good-bye. It is just possible that I may not see you again before I leave Paris."

"You are going to leave Paris soon?"

"Very soon."

"Then I suppose you have found out all you want to know about that poor girl who was murdered?"

"Yes, I have found out all I want to know."

"Thank God! It was so terrible to think there were people living who could suspect Bothwell."

"It is horrible to think there was any man base enough to murder that helpless girl—a man so steeped in hypocrisy that he could defy suspicion."

"You know who committed the murder?" inquired Hilda.

"I can answer no more questions. You will learn all in time. The difficulty will be to forget the hideous story when you have once heard it. Good-bye."

They were alone in the Tillet *salon*, Monsieur Tillet having retired while they were talking. He reappeared on the landing outside to hand Mr. Heathcote the parcel of sketches, and to make his respectful adieux to that discerning amateur.

"Monsieur your brother is the most accomplished Englishman I ever met," said the painter to Hilda, when his visitor had disappeared in the obscurity of the staircase.

He patted his waistcoat-pocket as he spoke. The sensation of having bank-notes there was altogether new. He had been fed upon the fat of the land by his devoted wife; he had been provided with

petty cash by his dutiful children; but to touch a lump sum, the price of his own work, seemed the renewal of youth.

"Do you remember the curious name of that picture of Landseer's, *ma chatte?*" he said, chucking his wife under the chin when she came bustling in from her housewifely errands. "'Zair is lif in ze all dogue yet.' Zair is lif in ze all dogue, *que voici.* See here, I have been earning money while you have been *flânochant.*"

He showed her the corner of the little sheaf of notes, coquettishly. She held out her hand, expecting to be intrusted with the treasure; but he shook his head gently, smiling a tender smile.

"No, *mon enfant,* we will not trifle with this windfall," he said. "We will treat it seriously; it shall be the nucleus of our future fortune, *j'achèterai des rentes.*"

The tears welled up to the wife's honest eyes, tears not of gratitude, but of mortification. She knew this husband of hers well enough to be very sure that every *sous* in those bank-notes would have dribbled out of the painter's pockets in a few

weeks; and that no one, least of all the squanderer himself, would know how it had been spent, or in what respect he was the better for its expenditure.

CHAPTER IX.

WAITING FOR HIS DOOM.

Life for Dora Wyllard was more than ever melancholy after Hilda's disappearance. The girl's companionship had been her only ray of sunshine during this time of sorrow and anxiety. In her sympathy with Hilda's joys and hopes she had been able to withdraw herself now and then from the contemplation of her own misery. Now this distraction was gone, and she was alone with her grief.

Julian Wyllard had shown much greater anger at Hilda's conduct than his wife had anticipated. He had taken the lovers under his protection, he had been curiously eager for their marriage, had talked of it, and had hurried it on with an almost feverish impatience. And now he would not hear of any excuse for Hilda's conduct.

"She has acted like a madwoman," he said. "When everything had been arranged to secure

her future happiness with Bothwell, her devoted slave, she allows herself to be driven away by the audacity of a brazen-faced coquette. I have no patience with her. But if Bothwell has any brains, he ought to be able to find her in a week, and bring her to her senses."

"Perhaps Bothwell may not care about running after her," speculated Dora.

"O, a man who is over head and ears in love will endure any outrage. He is a slavish creature, and the more he is trampled upon the better he loves his tyrant. It remains to be seen which of the two women Bothwell would rather marry—Hilda, with her rustic simplicity, or the widow, with her slightly damaged reputation and very handsome income."

"He does not waver for a moment between them."

"Ah, that is all you know; but if he does not give chase to Hilda, you may be sure it is because in his heart of hearts he hankers after the widow."

Bothwell had gone back to Trevena, intending to pay the builders for the work they had done,

and suspend the carrying out of the contract indefinitely.

He would have to give them some compensation, no doubt, for delay; but they were good, honest, rustic fellows, and he was not afraid of being severely mulcted.

Julian Wyllard spoke of Bothwell and his love affairs with the irritability of a chronic sufferer, and Dora listened and sympathised, and soothed the sufferer as best she might. Her burden was very heavy in these days. To see her beloved suffer and to be unable to lessen his pain, that was indeed bitter. And in his case the palliating drugs which deadened his agony seemed almost a worse evil than the pain itself. The constant use of morphia and chloral was working its pernicious effect, and there were times when the sufferer's mind wandered. There were dreams which seemed more agonising than wakeful hours of pain. Dora sat beside her husband's couch and watched him as he slept under the influence of morphia. She listened to his dull mutterings, in French for the most part. He rarely spoke any other language

in that troubled state of the brain between dreaming and delirium. It was evident to her that his mind, in these intervals of wandering, habitually harked back to the days of his residence in Paris, ten years ago. And his hallucinations at this time seemed always of a ghastly character. The scenes he looked upon were steeped in blood, doubtless a reminiscence of those hideous days of the Commune, when Paris was given over to fire and carnage. She shuddered as she saw the look of horror in his widely-opened yet sightless eyes—sightless for reality, but seeing strange visions—shapes of dread. She shuddered at the wild cry which broke from those white lips, the infinite pain in the lines of the forehead, damp with the cold dews of anguish.

In his waking hours, when free from the influence of chloral, the sufferer's brain was as clear as ever; but the irritation of his nerves was intense. A sound, the slightest, agitated him. A footstep in the corridor, a ring at the hall-door, startled him as if it had been a thunder-clap. His senses seemed always on the alert. There was no middle state between that intense activity of brain

and the coma or semi-delirium which resulted from opiates.

Sir William Spencer had been down to Penmorval twice since the invalid's return, but his opinion had not been hopeful on either occasion. On the second time of his coming he had seen a marked change for the worse. The malady had made terrible progress in a short interval. And now, on this dull gray autumn afternoon, within twenty-four hours of Heathcote's visit to the Rue du Bac, the famous physician came to Penmorval for the third time, and again could only bear witness to the progress of evil.

Wyllard insisted upon being alone with his physician.

"Sir William, I want you to tell me the truth about my case: the unsophisticated truth. There will be no end gained by your withholding it; for I have read up the history of this disease of mine, and I know pretty well what I have to expect. A gradual extinction, disfigurement and distortion of every limb and every feature, beginning with this withered, claw-shaped hand, and creeping on and

on, till I lie like an idiot, sightless, speechless, tasteless, with lolling tongue dribbling upon my pillow. And throughout this dissolution of the body I may yet, if specially privileged, retain the faculties of my mind. I may be to the last conscious of all that I have been and all that I am. There is the redeeming feature. I shall perish molecule by molecule, feeling my own death, able to appreciate every change, every stage in the inevitable progress of corruption. That lingering process of annihilation which other men suffer unconsciously underground I shall suffer consciously above ground. That is the history of my case, I take it, Sir William."

"There have been such cases."

"Yes, and mine is one of them."

"I do not say that. The fatal cases are certainly in the majority; but there have been cures. Whatever medicine can do—"

"Will be done for me. Yes, I know that. But the utmost you have been able to do so far has been to deaden pain, and that at the cost of some of the most diabolical dreams that ever man dreamed."

"Let us hope for the best, Mr. Wyllard," replied the great physician, with that grave and kindly tone which had brought comfort to so many doomed sufferers, the indescribable comfort which a sympathetic nature can always impart. "As your adviser, it is my duty to tell you that it would be well your house were set in order."

"All has been done. I made my will after my marriage. It gives all to my wife. She will deal with my fortune as the incarnate spirit of justice and benevolence. I have supreme confidence in her wisdom and in her goodness."

"That is well. Then there is no more to be said."

Ten minutes later the physician was being driven back to the station, and Julian Wyllard was alone.

"'And Swift expires a driveller and a show,'" he repeated, in a tone of suppressed agony. "Yes, that is the horror. To become a spectacle—a loathsome object from which even love would shrink away with averted eyes. That is the sting. Facial anæsthesia —every muscle paralysed, every feature distorted.

O, for the doomsman to make a shorter end of it all! The face has been spared so far—speech has hardly begun to falter. But it is coming—it is coming. I found myself forgetting common words this morning when I was talking to Dora. I caught myself babbling like a child that is just beginning to speak."

He took up a hand-mirror which he had asked his wife to leave near him, and contemplated himself thoughtfully for some moments.

"No, there is no change yet in the face, except a livid hue, like a corpse alive. The features are still in their right places, the mouth not yet drawn to one side; the eyelids still firm. But each stage of decay will follow in its course. And to know all the time that there is an easier way out of it, if one could but take it, just at the right moment, without being too much of a craven."

He glanced at the table by his sofa, a capacious table, holding his books, his reading-lamp, and his dressing-case with its elaborate appliances.

"If I did not want to know the issue of Heathcote's inquiries! If— O, for some blow from the

sledgehammer of Destiny, that would put an end to all irresolution, take my fate out of my own hands! A blow that would annihilate me, and yet spare her —if that could be."

A loud ringing at the hall-door sounded like an answer to an invocation. Julian Wyllard lifted his head a little way from the silken-covered pillows, and turned his haggard eyes towards the door leading into the corridor.

After an interval of some moments there came the sounds of footsteps, the door was opened, and the servant announced,

"Mr. Heathcote."

Heathcote stood near the threshold, hat in hand, deadly pale, grave to solemnity, mute as death itself.

"You have come back, Heathcote?" asked the invalid, with an off-hand air. "Then I conclude you have accomplished your mission, or reconciled yourself to failure."

"I have succeeded in my mission beyond my hopes," answered Heathcote. "But my success is as terrible to myself as it must needs be to others."

"Indeed! Does that mean that you have solved the mystery of the French girl's death?"

"It means as much, and more than that. It means, Julian Wyllard, that I have solved the mystery of *your life*—that double life which showed to the world the character of a hard-headed financier, passionless, mechanical, while the real nature of the man, passionate, jealous, vindictive, the lover and the slave of a beautiful woman, was known to but a few chosen friends. It means that slowly, patiently, link by link, detail after detail, I have put together the history of your life in Paris—the secret door by which the financier left his lonely office at nightfall, to drink the cup of pleasure with his mistress—or his wife—and his boon companions. By the inevitable sequence of small facts, by the agreement of dates, by a pencil sketch of the murderer's face, made from memory, yet vivid as flesh and blood, I have been able to identify you, Julian Wyllard, with the man who called himself Georges, who was known to a few privileged Bohemians as the lover of Marie Prévol, and who disappeared from Paris immediately after the murder, so completely as to baffle the police. The murderer

vanished utterly, before the crime was twelve hours old; yet he was known to have visited the grave of his victim up to March'74—the exact period at which you, Julian Wyllard, left Paris for ever. It means that in you, the man who came between me and the happiness of my life, who stole my betrothed—in you, the successful speculator, the honoured of all men, I have found the murderer of Léonie Lemarque and of her aunt Marie Prévol, and of her aunt's admirer, Maxime de Maucroix. A man must have a mind and heart of iron who could carry the consciousness of three such murders with a calm front; who could clasp his innocent wife to his breast, accept her caresses, her devotion, her revering love—knowing himself the relentless devil that he is! Julian Wyllard, thou art the man!"

"I am!" answered the white lips resolutely, while the haggard eyes flashed defiance. "I am that man. I have obeyed my destiny, which was to love with a desperate love, and hate with a desperate hate. I have gratified my love and my hatred. I have lived, Heathcote; lived as men of your stamp know not how to live; lived with every drop of blood

in my veins, with every beat of my heart: and now I am content to rot in a dishonoured grave, the abhorred of pettier sinners!"

"Julian!"

A wail—a cry of agony from a despairing woman—sounded in the utterance of that name.

CHAPTER X.

"ALIKE IS HELL, OR PARADISE, OR HEAVEN."

It was the despairing cry of a woman's breaking heart that came with that low wailing sound from the curtained doorway. Dora had been told of Heathcote's arrival, and had hurried from her dressing-room on the further side of the bedchamber. She had reached the threshold of the morning-room in time to hear Heathcote pronounce the dreadful word "Murder," and she had heard all that followed. She had heard her husband's proclaim himself triply an assassin.

"It is my wife's voice," said Wyllard quietly. "You knew that she was there, perhaps. You wanted her to hear."

"I did not know she was there; but it would have been my duty to tell her all I have discovered. She has lived under a delusion; she has lived under the spell of your consummate hypocrisy. It is only

right that she should know the truth. Thank God, she has heard it from your own lips."

"You have not forgotten the day when we were rivals for her love," said Wyllard, with a diabolical sneer. "I won the race, heavily handicapped; and now your turn has come. You have your revenge."

Heathcote was silent. His eyes were fixed upon the figure which appeared against the glowing darkness of the plush curtain, and came slowly, totteringly forward to Wyllard's couch, and sank in a heap beside it. The white, set face, with its look of agony, the widely-opened eyes, pale with horror, haunted him for long after that awful hour. It was he who had brought this agony upon her, he who had unearthed the buried skeleton, he who, going forth from that house to do her bidding, her true knight, her champion, her servant, had come back as the messenger of doom. Was he to blame that Fate had imposed this hateful task upon him? He told himself that he was blameless; but that she would never forgive.

"I congratulate you upon your perseverance and

your success," said Wyllard, after a pause. "You have succeeded where all the police of Paris had failed. Was it love for my wife, or hatred for me, that stood in the place of training and experience?"

"It was neither. It was the hand of Fate, the mysterious guiding of Providence, which took me from stage to stage of that horrible story."

"And it was my wife—my redeeming angel—who sent you forth upon your mission, who appealed to your love of the past as a claim on your devotion in the present. There is the irony of Fate in that part of the business," said Wyllard mockingly.

He had always hated Edward Heathcote; he had hated him even in the hour of his own triumph as Dora's accepted lover; hated him because he had once possessed Dora's love, but most of all because he had been worthy of it.

Julian Wyllard's head leaned forward upon his folded arms, and for some minutes there was silence in the room, save for the sound of suppressed sobbing from that kneeling figure by the sick man's couch. The face of the husband and the face of the wife

were alike hidden. Dora's head had fallen across her husband's knees, her hands were clasped above the dark coils of her hair, in the self-abandonment of her agony.

Heathcote stood a little way off, feeling as if he were in the presence of the dead. The mystery of those two hidden faces oppressed him. He almost hated himself for this thing which he had done. He felt like an executioner—a man from whom the stern necessity of his craft had exacted a revolting service.

"Julian, is this true?" murmured Dora, after a long silence. "Is all or any part of this dreadful story true?"

Her husband looked up suddenly, as if vivified by the sound of her voice.

"What would you think of me if it were all or any of it true?" he asked hoarsely. "Look up, Dora. Let me see your eyes as you answer me. I want to know how I am to stand henceforth in the sight of the woman who once loved me."

She lifted her head, and turned her deathlike face towards him, tearless, but with a look of

anguish deeper than he had ever seen before on any human countenance.

That other look, that last look of Léonie Lemarque's, which had haunted him waking or sleeping ever since the 5th of July, had been a look of horrified surprise. But here there was the quiet anguish of a broken heart.

"Who once loved you," she echoed. "Do you think such love as mine can be thrown off like an old gown? Tell me the truth, Julian—it can make no difference to my love."

Wyllard remained for some moments gazing dreamily at the low wood fire opposite his couch, silent, as if looking into the pages of the past.

"Yes, your story is put together very cleverly," he said, "and it is for the most part true. Yes, I am the murderer of Marie Prévol. I am that jealous devil, who in an access of fury destroyed the life that was dearer than his own. It was not that I believed her guilty. No, it was the agonising knowledge that her love had gone from me, in spite of herself—had gone to that younger, brighter, more fascinating lover. I saw the gradual working of the change—

saw coldness, dislike even, creeping over her who had once tenderly rewarded my love—saw that my coming was unwelcome, my departure a relief. She, who of old had followed me to the threshold, had hung upon me with sweetest caresses at the moment of parting, now could scarcely conceal her indifference, her growing aversion. I saw all this, and Satan took hold of me. Again and again I was on the verge of unpremeditated murder. My eyes grew dim, veiled by a cloud of blood; but I held my hand before the deed was done. I have had my grip upon her throat —that milk-white throat, which was purer of tint and lovelier of form than that of the Louvre Venus. I have seen the pleading eyes looking into mine, asking me for mercy, and I have fallen at her feet and sobbed like a child. But there came a time when this sullen devil of jealousy and hatred took a firmer hold of me, and then I swore to myself that they should both die. There was no help, no other cure. If she lived, she would leave me for Maucroix. She, the wife I had honoured, would sink into the mistress of a fop and a fribble, to be cast off when his fancy staled. I knew that was inevitable, so I made up

my mind, all of a sudden, when I got wind of her intended jaunt to Saint-Germain, from the spy I had employed to watch her. I put my revolver in my pocket, and followed her to the station, disguised by a pair of dark spectacles and a style of dress in which she had never seen me. I stood by the doorway of the waiting-room, and saw her sitting side by side with her favoured lover, they two as happy and as absorbed in each other as children at play in a garden. You know all the rest. Yes, it was I who watched in front of the Henri Quatre, saw those two laughing together in the candle-light: it was I who sprang out of the thicket in the forest and shot them down, one after the other, left them lying there side by side, dead. I had a strange wild feeling of happiness as I rushed away into the depths of the wood—a sense of triumph. I had won my love from her new lover. She had been mine only; and she would be mine now until the end. I had saved her from her own weakness—saved her from the dishonour which her folly must have made inevitable."

He paused for a few moments, but neither Dora

nor Heathcote spoke, and after the briefest silence he went on with his confession.

"I never meant to survive my victims, except just so long as would be necessary to put my affairs in order, and to transfer my securities to England, where those of my own flesh and blood might profit by my fortune. In order to do this I got quietly back to Paris, and began to take up the threads of my business life with a view to closing the book for ever. You know enough of my character and my history to understand that I have always had perfect command over my emotions, and you will therefore believe that I was able to go about my daily business, to mix with my fellow-men, with as serene a manner and countenance as if not a ripple of passion had crossed the stagnant surface of my plodding nature. I had so trained myself that the man of passion and emotions was one being, and the man of business another, a creature totally apart. And now, for a while at least, the man of feeling was dead and buried, and only the money-making automaton remained.

"It happened at that time that a cloud of disaster swept over the Paris Bourse. Had I wound up my

affairs at that period, I should have been a heavy loser; and I, to whom the science of finance was a passion, could not submit to losses which I knew how to avoid. So I delayed the settlement of my affairs, and even allowed myself to be tempted into fresh enterprises. Yet scarcely a night passed on which I did not look at my pistols before I lay down to rest, and long for the time when I should feel myself free to end my miserable life."

"And in those days you went frequently to the cemetery, to place your tribute of roses on your victim's grave," said Heathcote.

"It was the only mark of affection I could show to the woman my love had killed," answered Wyllard; "the only token of respect for my wife."

"Your wife?" exclaimed the other. "Then Barbe Girot was right in her supposition. You loved Marie Prévol well enough to marry her."

"I loved her too well to degrade her," answered Wyllard. "It was in the flood-tide of my financial success, when I was almost drunk with fortune, and had not one thought above money-making, that Marie Prévol's face awakened me to a new life. That

lovely face—so like yours, Dora—yes, it was the likeness to my good angel of the past that drew me to you, my good angel of the present, my comforter, my better-self. O, but for that second unpremeditated crime, the evil work of a moment's savage passion, I might have gone down to the grave in peace, believing that I had expiated that first murder, atoned for that double bloodshed by the agonies that had gone before and after it. But that last crime wrecked me. It revealed the blackness of my diabolical nature—a nature in which the evil is inherent, the good only the effect of education and surroundings.

"Yes, she was my wife, and I gave her all honour and reverence due to a wife: though it was my caprice, my false pride perhaps, to keep my relations with her a profound secret. I had won my reputation in Paris as the stolid, unemotional Englishman; a man of iron, a creature without passions or human weaknesses, a calculating machine. It was this reputation which had helped most of all to bring me wealth. To be known all at once as the lover and the husband of a beautiful actress would have been

social, and might have been financial, ruin. The men who had trusted me with their money to stake on the speculator's wheel of fortune would have withdrawn their confidence. I should have been left to fight single-handed on my own capital, and my own capital, large as it was by this time, was not large enough for my schemes. The Crédit Mauresque was then in the front rank of public favour, and it was generally considered that I was the Crédit Mauresque. Any weakness on my part and the bubble would have burst. So I planned for myself a dual existence. By day I was the cool-headed financier; but when the stars were high and the lamps lighted I was Georges, the American-Parisian, the Eccentric and Bohemian—the friend and entertainer of a little band of choice spirits, journalists, musicians, painters —the lover, husband, slave of Marie Prévol. Ah, Dora, for the first two years of that midnight life there was compensation in it for all the restraints of the day, for the anxiety, the fever, the fret of a speculator's hazardous career.

"Yes, she was my wife. I married her in a village church in the Lake country; a quiet little

church half hidden among the hills which encircle Derwentwater—a sweet spot. Do you remember once asking me to take you to the English Lakes, Dora? I had to invent an excuse for refusing. I could not revisit those scenes, even with you."

Again there was silence, broken only by the sound of Dora's weeping. She was still on her knees beside her husband's couch; her hand still clasped his. Not all the horror that had been revealed to her could change her love to hate or scorn. Deepest pity filled her breast. She, to whose nature deeds of violence were altogether alien, could yet enter into and sympathise with the feelings of this sinner, whose fatal passions had sunk him in an abyss of crime. She pitied him, and clung to him, ready with words of comfort whenever such words might be spoken. Even in her silence the very touch of her hand told of consolation and of pity.

"I married my love in that quiet village church—married her under my assumed name of Gustave Georges; but the marriage was sound enough in law, and for me it meant a life-long bond. I had found Marie Prévol pure and innocent in the tainted

atmosphere of a Parisian theatre, a creature incapable of guile. I honoured her for that innate purity which was independent of surroundings and circumstances, which had passed unscathed through the fiery furnace of Bohemian Paris. The first years of our wedded life were full of happiness, steeped in a love which knew no change or diminution. My darling seemed to me, day by day, more adorable, and it may be that the secrecy of my double life, the long hours of severance, the narrow circle in which Marie and I lived when we were together—it may be that these circumstances, and the strangeness of our relations, intensified my passion, lending to our wedded bliss all the charm of mystery and romance. Ah, how sweet were our brief holidays at Biarritz or Pau, our wanderings in picturesque old Spain, far away from the beaten tracks, choosing mostly those places to which the world did not go! So far as it went, that life of ours was a perfect life; and I was fool enough to think that it would last for ever."

He sighed, and sank for some moments into a dreamy silence, his eyes fixed in a vision of that past existence.

"My wife had an intense delight in the theatre, and her successes there. She was never a famous actress; but her beauty had made her the rage. She had a birdlike soprano voice, and a bewitching manner. She was one of those adorable actresses who enchant their audience without ever losing their own individuality. She was always Marie Prévol; but the public wanted her to be nothing else. As I kept her entirely secluded from society for my own reasons, I could not deny her the pleasure of pursuing her profession. It pleased her to earn a handsome salary, to know that she was not entirely dependent on me, to be able to help her mother, who was a harpy, continually taking money from me. So she remained on the stage, to my destruction; for it was there that Maucroix saw her; and it was because she was an actress that he dared to pursue her with attentions which she at first repulsed, but which she afterwards encouraged.

"No, Dora, I will not dwell upon that hideous time, those days and nights of madness and despair. I saw her love going from me. I saw the subtle change from affection to indifference, from indiffer-

ence to fear, from fear to disgust, and then to horror. She was kind to me still, from a sense of duty, meek, obedient, a gentle yielding wife. But I saw her shiver at my approach; I felt her hand grow cold in mine; I found repulsion instead of warm confiding love. Nor was I allowed long to remain in ignorance as to the cause of the change. A kind friend of mine was also an acquaintance of Maucroix. He informed me of the young man's passion for Marie, of his having sworn to win her at any cost—yes, even at the cost of the coronet which he had the power to bestow upon her. He was independent, rich, able to do as he liked with his life. He was one of the handsomest young men in Paris, and was said to be the most fascinating. And I was a hard-headed man of business, anxious, brain-weary, long past the flush of hopeful youth. Could I wonder that Marie turned from me to her young adorer? I gave her all credit for having struggled against her infatuation, for having been true to her duty as a wife even to the last; but she had ceased to love me, and the day was at hand when the barriers would be broken, when that im-

passioned woman's heart of hers, that fond impulsive nature, whose every pulse I knew, would yield at a breath, and she whom I worshipped would fall to blackest depths of sin.

"Then, like Othello, I called this deed which I had to do, a sacrifice, and not a murder.

"You have heard the story of my crime from the lips of your friend here. He has unravelled the tangled skein with a wonderful ingenuity. Yes, it was I who laid those roses on my victim's grave. I stayed in Paris long enough to save appearances, the man Georges being supposed to have fled to the utmost ends of the earth. I went about among my fellow-men on the Bourse and in the clubs, and heard them discuss the murder of Marie Prévol. Once I was told, by a man who had met me as Georges, of my likeness to the supposed murderer; but those few chosen friends who had known me as Georges were not men to be met on the Bourse or in financial circles, and I had always eschewed mixed society. My identity with the murderer was never suspected. I saved my fortune, wound up my affairs, and left Paris, as I thought for ever, went

forth from that accursed city as I would have gone out of hell. I came back to England with the brand of Cain, not upon my brow, but upon my heart. I wandered in a purposeless fashion from place to place, possessed of a restless devil. I had my office in London, where I tried to find a distraction in the excitement of speculation, the financial strategy which had once been my delight. Vain the effort. I was no happier in London than I had been in Paris, within a few minutes' walk of the house that had sheltered my wife, the secret home in which I had been so happy.

"Haunted always by the same dark thoughts, seeing only one image amidst every change of surroundings, I came at last to this fag-end of England. The rugged scenery, the wild coast-line, the sparsely populated moors and fells pleased me better than anything I had seen on this side of the Channel. The landscape harmonised with my melancholy thoughts, and exercised a soothing influence upon my mind. I became more reconciled to my life. Conscience, as you, Dora, or you, Heathcote, may accept the word, had troubled me but little. I had

exercised what I held to be my right—my right to slay the woman who had broken my heart, the man who had spoiled my life. I was oppressed by no particular horror at the thought of blood-guiltiness. The agony from which I suffered was the loss of Marie's love, the loss of the woman who had once filled my life with happiness.

"I took kindly to your native soil, Dora. It might be a foreshadowing of the love which was to gladden my latter days. My mind grew clearer, the burden seemed to be lifted from me. And then in a happy hour I met *you*.

"Do you remember that first meeting, Dora?"

"Yes, I remember," she said softly, her head drooping upon her husband's pillow, her face hidden, an attitude of mourning, like a marble figure bending over a funeral urn.

"It was in the picture-gallery at Tregony Manor. I had been taken there as a stranger by the Rector of the parish, to see a famous Wouvermans. Your mother received me in the friendliest spirit; and while we were talking about her pictures you appeared at the other end of the gallery, a girlish

figure in a white gown, carrying your garden-hat in your hand, surprised at seeing a stranger."

"I remember how you started, how oddly you looked at me," murmured his wife.

"I was looking at a face out of the grave—the face of Marie Prévol; younger, fresher, but not more innocent in its stainless beauty than Marie's face when I first knew her. The likeness is but a vague one, perhaps—a look, an air; but to me at that moment it struck home. My heart went out to you at once. If my murdered wife had come back to me in some angelic form, had offered me peace, and pardon, and the renewal of love, I could not have surrendered myself more completely to that superhuman bliss than I surrendered myself to you. I loved you from the first, and swore to myself that you should be mine. I do not think I used any dishonourable arts in order to win you."

"You knew that she was the betrothed of another man, knew that your hands were stained with blood," said Heathcote, with suppressed indignation. "Was there no dishonour in tempting a

pure-minded girl with your love? You, whose heart must be as a charnel-house!"

"I had put every thought of that dark past behind me before I entered Tregony Manor. Was I a different man, do you think, because in one dark hour of my life I had sinned against the law of civilised society, and revenged my own wrongs according to the universal law of unsophisticated mankind? I loved my new love not the less dearly because of that crime. I loved her as women are not often loved. Dora, speak to me; tell me if I have ever failed in any duty which a husband owes to an idolised wife. Have I ever been false to the promises of our betrothal?"

"Never; never, my beloved," murmured the low mournful voice.

"We might have lived happily to the end, perhaps, had Fate been kinder. I had my dark dreams now and again, acted over my past crime, my old agonies, in the helplessness of slumber; but this was only a transient evil. My darling's influence could always soothe and restore me, even in the darkest hour. All went well with me—better, per-

haps, than life goes with many a better man—until the fatal hour when I received a letter from Marie Prévol's mother, written on her death-bed, asking me to find a home in England for her orphan granddaughter, the child I had heard of in the Rue Lafitte, and who had occasionally stayed there as Marie's pet and plaything, but whom I had avoided at all times.

"I answered the letter promptly, in my character of a friend of the missing Georges. It was in this character that I had contrived from time to time to send money for the relief of Madame Lemarque's necessities. I sent money to bring the girl to London, and arranged to meet her at the railway-station. That was when I went ostensibly to buy the famous Raffaelle, Dora. I was somewhat uncertain as to my plans for the girl's future; but I meant kindly by her; I had no thought but of being kind to her. If she should prove an amiable girl, with pleasing manners, my idea was to bring her to this neighbourhood, to get her placed as a nursery governess somewhere within my ken, to introduce her to you, and to secure your kindness and protec-

tion for her. I had paid for her education at a convent in Brittany; and I had been assured that she left the convent with an excellent character. She was the only link remaining with the terrible past, the only witness of my crime; but I had been told that after her illness all memory of that crime had left her. I had been assured that I should run no risk in having her about me."

"Poor child," said Dora, with a stifled sob, recalling that summer evening when Julian Wyllard came out of the station, a little paler than usual, but self-possessed and calm, telling her in measured tones of the calamity upon the line—the strange death of a nameless girl.

"I met her at Charing Cross in the early summer morning," he continued quietly. "She was flurried and frightened—so frightened by the strange faces and the strange language round about her, that she forgot to tell me of the bag she had deposited in the waiting-room. But I succeeded in putting her at her ease; and while she was taking breakfast with me in a private room at the hotel, she told me all about her grandmother's death, and her own educa-

tion in the convent; what she could do in the way of teaching. She was frank and gentle, and seemed a good girl, and I had no thought but to do the utmost for her advantage. I could have pensioned her and made her independent of all service; but I considered that for a friendless girl there could be no better discipline than the necessity of earning a living under reputable circumstances, and protected by powerful friends.

"We drove together to Paddington—as your cabman informed you," continued Wyllard, addressing himself for an instant to Heathcote, whom he for the most part ignored. "At Paddington I took a second-class ticket for Plymouth, not quite resolved as to whether I should take the girl on at once to Bodmin, or leave her in the care of the wife of my frame-maker at Plymouth, an honest creature, who would, I knew, be faithful to any trust I reposed in her. I put my *protégée* in a second-class carriage, in the care of some friendly people, and I rode alone in a first-class compartment. I wanted to be free to think out the situation, to decide on my line of conduct. I knew that she had a packet of my letters—my

early letters to Marie Prévol, written without reserve, out of the fulness of my heart—letters identifying me with the man Georges. It was vital that I should get these letters from her before she left the railway-carriage. Yet, with a curious weakness, I delayed making the attempt till we came to Plymouth. There would be fewer people in the carriages then, I thought. It would be easier for me to be alone with Léonie. I had by this time decided upon taking her on to Bodmin, and finding her a temporary home in my steward's family.

"At Plymouth I left my own compartment, intending to go straight to the second-class carriage in which I had placed Léonie: but on the platform I was met by people I knew, who detained me in conversation till the train was within two minutes of starting. While I was talking to these people I saw Léonie wandering up and down the platform in an aimless way, perhaps looking for me. I had told her that I would let her know when she had come to the end of her journey, and now she was mystified by the delay, and feared that I had forgotten her. About one minute before the starting of the train I

escaped from my troublesome friends, and got into an empty second-class, into which I beckoned Léonie as she came along the platform.

"We crossed the bridge and came into Cornwall; and now there was but the shortest time for me to explain my views as to the girl's future, and to get from her those fatal letters, which told the history of my love for Marie Prévol, my double life as her husband, and which, by the evidence of my own handwriting, identified me with her murderer. I was determined that Léonie should not leave the train with that packet in her possession, but I anticipated no difficulty in getting it from her.

"I told her my views, promised her that I would be to her as a guardian and friend, so long as she should deserve my protection, assured her that the happiness and prosperity of her future life were contingent only on her good conduct. And then I asked her for the packet which Madame Lemarque had told her to deliver to me. But to my astonishment she refused to give it to me. Her grandmother had told her that she was never to part with those letters. She was to keep the packet unopened

so long as I was kind to her, so long as she was protected by my care; but if at any time I withdrew my help from her, and she was in difficulty or want, she was then to open the packet and read the letters. Her own good sense would tell her how to act when she had read them. In a word, the letters were to remain in this girl's possession as a sword to hang over my head.

"I tried to make the girl understand the infamy of such a line of conduct—tried to make her see that her grandmother had schooled her in the vilest form of *chantage*. 'You see me willing to help you freely, generously, for the sake of an old friend,' I said; 'and surely you would not use these letters as a lever to extort money from me.' All my arguments were useless. The discipline of the convent had taught the girl blind and implicit obedience to priests and parents. She would not consider anything except the fact that certain instructions had been given to her by her dying grandmother, and that her duty was to obey those instructions.

"I was patient at the beginning; but the unhappy creature's dogged resistance made my blood boil.

Passion got the better of me. I caught her by the shoulder with one hand, while I snatched the packet from her feeble grasp with the other. I was beside myself with rage. While I bent over her, holding her as in a vice, she gave a sudden shriek, a shriek of horrified surprise.

"'The face in the wood,' she cried, 'the murderer! the murderer!'

"My hand relaxed its grip; she broke from me, and dashed open the door of the carriage. 'I will tell people what you are!' she gasped, breathless with fury. 'You shall not escape. Yes, I remember your face now—the face I saw in my dreams—the savage face in the wood.'

"She was on the footboard, clinging to the iron by the window, muttering to herself like a mad thing. God alone knows what she meant to do. She wanted to make my crime known, to bring the train to a standstill, to have me arrested then and there. While she stood wavering on that narrow ledge, her life hanging by a thread, the train rounded the curve and passed on to the viaduct. The stony gorge was below, deep and narrow, like

an open grave — tempting me — tempting me as Satan tempts his own. One sudden movement of my arm, and all was over. I had held her, for the first few moments. I had tried to save her. Had she been reasonable, I would have saved her. But there was no middle course. Ruin, unutterable ruin for me, or death for her. One motion of my arm, and she was gone. Light as a feather, the frail little figure fluttered down the gorge. Another minute, and the train stopped. I had my railway-key ready before the stoppage, and did not lose an instant in getting along the off-side of the line back to the compartment I had left. Every head without exception was turned towards the side on which the girl had fallen. The only witness of my crime had been destroyed, and my letters were safe in my own keeping, to be burned at the earliest opportunity."

"You burned them that night," said Dora. "I remember. And that tress of hair which you were looking at when I went into the library—"

"Was cut from Marie's head after death. The mother had placed it amongst those fatal letters.

That night, after an interval of years, I touched the soft bright hair on which my hand had so often lingered in adoring love—that lovely hair which my hand had stained with blood."

There was no more to be told. An awful silence followed, a silence in which even Dora's sobs no longer sounded. There was a tearless agony which was deeper than that passion of tears.

She rose from her knees and turned towards Heathcote, white to the lips, icy cold, looking at him as if he had been a stranger, and as if she expected no more mercy from him than from a stranger.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "You have come here alone; but perhaps there are people waiting outside—policemen, to take my husband to prison. He cannot run away from them; your victim is quite helpless."

"My victim? O Dora, how cruel that sounds from you!"

"Yes, I know," she said hurriedly. "I asked you to find out the mystery of that murder, and you have obeyed me. My husband—my husband an

assassin!" she cried, flinging her clasped hands above her head in an access of despair; "my husband, whom I believed in as the noblest and best of men. He was tempted to blackest sin—tempted by the madness of jealousy, wrought upon afterwards by a sudden panic. He was not a despicable sinner—not like the man who poisons his friend, or who kills the helpless for the sake of money. It was an ungovernable passion which wrecked him—it was a fatal love which led him to crime. Heathcote," falling at his feet with a wild cry of appeal, "have mercy on him; for my sake, have mercy. Think of his helplessness. Remember how low he has been brought already—how heavily God's hand has been laid upon him. Have mercy."

Heathcote lifted her from her knees, as he had done once before in his life, when she pleaded to him for pardon for her own falsehood.

"I would not hurt a snake if you loved it, Dora," he said. "Neither you nor your husband have anything to fear from me. Parisian juries are very merciful; but I will not submit Mr. Wyllard to the inconvenience of a trial. As for the episode upon

the railway—we will try to think *that* an accident, an unlucky impulse, unpremeditated, falling considerably short of murder. No, Dora, I do not intend to deliver up your husband to the law. The one person who has the highest right to cry for vengeance has learnt the sublimity of submission to the Divine Will. I have seen the widowed mother of Maxime de Maucroix; and from her lips I have heard the reproof of my own revengeful feelings. But although I am content to be silent, it would be well for Julian Wyllard, when he shall feel the hand of death upon him, to write the admission of his guilt; since that alone can thoroughly clear your cousin Bothwell before his fellow-men. So dark a suspicion once engendered may hang over a man for a lifetime."

"I will bear in mind your thoughtful suggestion," said Wyllard. "I thank you, Heathcote, for your mercy to a fallen foe. A wretch so abject, so smitten by the hand of Fate, would be too mean a creature for your revenge. You are not like the noble Achilles, and would hardly care to drag a corpse at your chariot-wheel, and wreak your rage

upon impotence. The play is played out, the lights are down. Let the curtain fall in decency and silence. For *her* sake be merciful."

"Make your peace with your offended God, if you can," answered Heathcote. "You have nothing to fear from me."

He moved slowly towards the door, and at the last turned and held out his hand to Dora. She hesitated for an instant, looking at her husband.

"Give him your hand, Dora," said Wyllard. "I can bear to see you clasp hands with the man who has read the riddle of Léonie Lemarque's death. I have come to a stage at which life and death make but little difference to me, and even shame is dead. Give him your hand. You may need his friendship and protection some day when I am under ground, and when people look at you with a morbid interest, as the murderer's widow. It will be wise to shuffle off my tainted name as soon as you decently can. Change it for a better name, Dora."

"Julian, how can you be so cruel?"

She was by his side again, with her hand in his, forgetful of all things except her love for him, her

pity for his pain. All her natural horror at his guilt was not strong enough to extinguish her love, or to lessen her compassion. As she had pitied him for his physical infirmity, so she now pitied him for his mental infirmity—a mind swayed to crime by undisciplined passions.

Heathcote left the room without another word. He had come there as the messenger of Fate. He had no further business in that house.

He had heard from the butler that Sir William Spencer and the local physician had been in consultation together that afternoon, and that the man had gathered from their talk as they left the house that Mr. Wyllard's illness was likely to end fatally, sooner than Sir William had at first supposed.

"Give me my sleeping draught, and then go, Dora," said Wyllard, when he and his wife were alone.

She prepared to obey him. The nurse was taking her rest at this hour, and it was the wife's privilege to attend upon her husband. The morphia sleeping draughts had been administered with rigid care, Dora herself watching the allotment of every bottle,

lest the unhappy sufferer should be tempted to take an overdose and end the tragedy of pain. Once, when she had betrayed her anxiety by a word spoken unawares, she had seen a curious smile upon her husband's pale lips, a smile that told her he had read her thoughts; and now she felt the peril of suicide was a much nearer dread. What had he to live for now—he who stood confessed a murderer, before the wife who had revered him?

The sleeping draughts had been sent in from the local doctor, half a dozen at a time, the patient taking two and sometimes three in the course of the day and night. Dora kept them under lock and key in the cabinet, where she kept her drawing materials, an old tulip-wood cabinet of Dutch inlaid work that stood in a corner of the room, at some distance from the sick man's sofa.

On the table by his side stood his dressing-case, with its glittering array of silver-gilt-topped bottles—eau de cologne, toilet vinegar, sal volatile. His medicine glass was on the same table.

And now, while Dora stood with her face towards the cabinet, Wyllard's crippled hands were busied

with one of those bottles in the dressing-case. With a wonderful swiftness and dexterity, taking into account the condition of his hands, he drew out one of the smallest bottles in the case, and unscrewed the stopper. The bottle contained about half an ounce of a clear white liquid.

Wyllard poured this liquid into a glass, which he held ready for Dora when she brought him the sleeping draught. The colourless liquid would have hardly showed in the bottom of the glass under any circumstances, but Wyllard was careful to screen it with his hand.

Dora poured out the sleeping draught, looking at him all the while in saddest silence. What could she say to him from whose familiar face the mask had fallen? The husband she had loved and honoured was lost to her for ever. The helpless wretch lying there was a stranger to her; a sinner so begrimed with sin that only the infinite compassion of woman could behold him without loathing.

"I drink this to your future happiness, Dora," he said solemnly, "and remember that at my last hour I blessed you for your goodness to a great sinner."

There was that in his tone which warned her of his purpose. She flung out her arms, trying to seize the hand that held the glass, before he could drink. But the table was between them, and the glass was at his lips when he finished speaking. He drained it to the last drop, gave one long sigh, and fell back upon his pillow—dead.

"Hydrocyanic acid," said the local practitioner when he came to look at the corpse, "and a happy release into the bargain. I should like to have given him an overdose of morphia myself, if the law of the land would have allowed me; or to have operated on the base of his brain and killed him tenderly in the interests of science, just to find out whether Cruveilhier or Virchow was right in his theorising as to the seat of the malady. I go for Virchow, backed by Gull."

CHAPTER XI.

"SWEET IS DEATH FOR EVERMORE."

DISMAL hours, dreary days of monotonous melancholy, a hopeless lassitude of mind and body, followed for Julian Wyllard's widow after that awful sudden death. Every one was very kind; every one was considerate; even the law was more than usually indulgent. The horror of an inquest was spared to that desolate mourner. Things were made very easy by Sir William Spencer's recent visit, by the fact that he had been heard by the servants to pronounce Mr. Wyllard's condition hopeless. Mr. Nicholls, the local practitioner, registered the cause of death as muscular atrophy, and considered himself justified in so doing, as to his mind suicide had been only a symptom of the malady, a paroxysm of despair following quickly upon Sir William Spencer's admission that the end was inevitable.

"If ever a man had a right to take his own life,

that man had," said Mr. Nicholls, when he argued the matter with his own conscience.

An inquest would have done good to nobody; but Mr. Nicholls was very anxious for a post-mortem. He wanted to see if the muscles were much wasted, if the medulla itself showed traces of disease—whether Cruveilhier or Virchow had the best of the argument. But he was not allowed this privilege.

Those early stages of bereavement, while the house was darkened—that sunless autumn day on which the funeral train wound slowly over the moor to the distant burial-ground, the reading of the will, the coming and going of friends and legal advisers, were as an evil dream to Dora Wyllard. She took no part in anything. She affected no interest in anything. Just at the last she was asked if she would not like to lay her offering upon the coffin—one of those costly wreaths, those snow-white crosses of fairest exotics, which had been sent in profusion to the wealthy dead—and she had shrunk from the questioner with a shudder.

"Flowers upon *that* coffin? No, no, no!"

Yet at the last moment, when the dismal pro-

cession was leaving the hall, she appeared suddenly in the midst of the mourners, pale as the dead, and broke through the crowd, and placed her tribute on the coffin-lid, a handful of wild violets gathered with her own hands in the melancholy autumn shrubberies. She bent down and laid her face upon the coffin. "I loved you once!" she moaned, "I loved you once!" And then kind hands drew her away, half-fainting, and led her back to her room.

The blow had quite unsettled poor Mrs. Wyllard's mind, people said afterwards, recounting this episode, at second, third, or fourth hand. No one was surprised when she left Penmorval within a week of the funeral, and went on the Continent with her two old servants, Priscilla and Stodden.

Heathcote and Bothwell had planned everything for her, both being agreed that she must be taken away from the scene of her sorrow as speedily as the thing could be done; and she had obeyed them implicitly, unquestioningly, like a little child.

What could it matter where she went, or what became of her? That was the thought in her own mind when she assented so meekly to every arrange-

ment that was being made for her welfare. What grief that ever widowed heart had to bear could be equal to her agony? It was not the loss of a husband she had adored—that loss for this life which might have been balanced by gain in a better life. It was the extinction of a beloved image for ever. It was the knowledge that this man, to whom she had given the worship of her warm young heart, the enthusiastic regard of inexperienced girlhood, had never been worthy of her love; that he had come to her weary from the disappointment of a more passionate love than he could ever again offer to woman—the first deep love of a strong nature—a love that burns itself into heart and mind as aqua-fortis into steel. He had come to her stained with blood-guiltiness—an unconfessed assassin—holding his head high among his fellow-men, playing the good citizen, the generous landlord, the patron, the benefactor—he who had slain the widow's only son. He had lived a double life, hiding his pleasures, lest his gains should be lessened by men's knowledge of his lighter hours. He, who had seemed to her the very spirit of truth and honour, had been

steeped to the lips in falsehood—a creature of masks and semblances. This it was which bowed her to the dust; this it was which weighed upon her spirits as no common loss could have done.

With her own hands she explored her husband's desk and despatch-boxes—the receptacles for all his more important papers—in search of any written confession which should attest the dead man's guilt, and for ever establish Bothwell's innocence. It would have been unutterable agony to her to have made such a confession public—to have let the curious eyes of the world peer in upon that story of guilt and shame; yet had any such document existed, she would have deemed it her duty to make it public—her duty to her kinsman, who had been made the scapegoat of another man's crimes. Happily for her peace there was no such paper to be found—not a line, not a word which hinted at the dead man's secret; and happily for Bothwell the cloud that had hung over him had by this time dispersed. The steadiness with which he had held his ground in the neighbourhood, the fact of his engagement to Miss Heathcote, had weighed with his Bodmin

traducers; and those who had been the first to hint their suspicions were now the readiest to protest against the infamy of such an idea. Had Bothwell emigrated immediately after the inquest at the Vital Spark, these same people would have gone down to the grave convinced that he was the murderer.

But before the end of that year there occurred an event which was considered an all-sufficient proof of Bothwell's innocence, and an easy solution of the mystery of the unknown girl's death. A miner entered a solitary farmhouse between Bodmin and Lostwithiel, in the dim gray of a winter evening, and killed two harmless women-folk—an old woman and a young one—for the sake of a very small booty. He was caught red-handed, tried, convicted, and hanged in Bodmin Gaol: but although he confessed nothing, and died a hardened impenitent miner, it was believed by every one in the place that his was the pitiless hand which had sent the French girl to her doom.

"She had a little bit o' money about her, maybe, poor lass, and he took it from her, and when she screamed he pushed her out of the train. Such

a man would think no more of doing it than of wringing the neck of a chicken," said an honest townsman of Bodmin.

Thus having identified somebody as the murderer, Bodmin was content; and Bothwell Grahame was more popular than he had ever been in the neighbourhood. He gave the county town but little of his society, notwithstanding this restoration to local favour. He rarely played billiards at the inn, or loitered to gossip in the High Street. He could not forget that people had once looked coldly upon him, that he had suffered the shame of unjust suspicion. At Trevena he was happy, for there no one had ever so wronged him; there he was a favourite with everybody, from the rector to the humblest fisherman. At Trevalga, too, and at Boscastle he had friends. He could afford to turn his back upon the people who had been so ready to think evil of him.

One of Heathcote's first cares after the Penmorval funeral had been to write to the Baronne de Maucroix. His letter was to the following effect:

"It is my grave duty to inform you, Madame, that the murderer of your son has confessed his crime, and also that he has escaped from all earthly tribunals to answer for his sins before the Judge of all men. A painful malady, from which he had been for some time a sufferer, ended fatally on the evening of the 19th inst., within the hour in which he confessed his guilt. His case had been pronounced hopeless by a distinguished physician; but it is just possible the shock caused by the unexpected revelation of his crime may have hastened his end.

"Accept, Madame, my respectful homage, and permit me also to express my admiration of that truly Christian spirit which you evinced at our late interview. EDWARD HEATHCOTE."

By return of post Heathcote received an answer to his letter; but the answer was not in the handwriting of the Baronne de Maucroix. That hand was at rest for ever. The letter was from the Baronne's friend and confessor, the curé of the village adjacent to her château.

"Monsieur,—Under the sad circumstances prevailing at the château, I have taken it upon myself, with the permission of the late Baronne's legal representative, to reply to your polite communication, which was never seen by the eyes of my lamented friend and benefactress, Madame de Maucroix. Upon that very evening which you name in your letter as the date of the murderer's death, I called at the château, soon after vespers, according to my daily custom; being permitted at that period of the day's decline to enjoy an hour's quiet conversation with that saintly woman who has now been taken from us. I was ushered as usual into the *salon*, where I quietly awaited Madame de Maucroix's appearance, having been told that she was in her son's room, that apartment which she used as her oratory.

"I knew that it was her custom to spend hours in that chamber of her beloved dead, absorbed in spiritual meditations; so I waited with patience, and without surprise, for more than an hour, musing by the fire. Then, wondering at this unusual forgetfulness in one always so considerate, I ventured to lift

the *portière* and to pass through the intervening *salon*, which was in darkness, to the bedchamber, where, through the half-open door, I saw a lamp burning.

"I pushed the door a little further open, and went in. The Baronne was on her knees beside the bed, her clasped hands stretched out straight before her upon the satin coverlet, her face leaning forward. I should have withdrawn in respectful silence, but there was something stark and rigid in the dear lady's attitude which filled me with fear. I wondered that she had not been disturbed by the sound of my footsteps, for my heavy shoes had creaked as I walked across the floor. I drew nearer to her. Not a breath, not a movement.

"I bent over her and touched the clasped hands. They were still for ever in death. It was a peaceful, a blessed ending: such an end as they who best loved that noble creature would have chosen for her.

"Accept, Monsieur, the assurance of my high consideration. PIERRE DUPLESSI."

CHAPTER XII.

"WHO KNOWS NOT CIRCE?"

THE Cornish tors, those wild brown hills upon whose dark foreheads time writes no wrinkles, were just one year older since Julian Wyllard's death, and Bothwell Grahame was established in his house at Trevena as an instructor of the embryo Engineer. Already two lads had gone forth from Bothwell's house, after six months' training, and had done well at Woolwich. Other lads were coming to him—sons of men he had known in Bengal. He was on the high road to reputation.

After that first passionate disgust with all things, during which he had stopped the builders, and prepared to quash that contract which he had signed with such delight, there had come a more tranquil spirit; and Bothwell Grahame had faced his last unexpected trouble with a resolute mind.

A conversation which he had with Edward Heath-

cote soon after Julian Wyllard's death had given him his first gleam of light. Heathcote spoke to him hopefully of the future, and urged him to wait quietly.

"Your marriage will be so much the wiser, so much the more likely to result in lasting happiness, for this delay," he said. "If you are as loyal and staunch as I believe you to be; if it is really my sister you would like to marry, and not this fascinating widow, who woos you with fortune in one hand and social status in the other; if you are really bent upon sacrificing these good things for Hilda's sake, be sure she will ultimately accept your sacrifice. In the mean time be patient, and pursue your independent course. A woman always respects a man who can live without her."

"But I cannot," answered Bothwell. "Life will be less than life to me till Hilda and I are one."

"Don't let her know that, if you mean to be master of your fate in the future," said Heathcote. "Time can be the only test of your truth. If when a year is past you have not married Lady Valeria Harborough, the chances are that my sister will

begin to have faith in you. I know that she loves you."

"Tell me where she is, that I may go to her—that I may convince her."

"I have promised to respect her secret," answered Heathcote firmly.

Bothwell accepted this friendly counsel with a good grace, went back to his old lodgings at Trevena, set the builders at work again, spent his days in the open air and his nights in hard study, ate little, slept less, and looked like the ghost of his former self.

He saw no more of Lady Valeria; but a society paper informed him early in November that she had taken a villa at Monaco. He could guess from what fount of consolation she was obtaining oblivion of her griefs. Her grace, her charm of manner, were dwelt upon fondly by the paragraphist. She was leading a life of absolute seclusion on account of her recent bereavement; but she was the admired and observed of all wherever she appeared.

The succeeding paragraph told of Sir George Varney's residence at one of the chief hotels. He

was a distinguished figure at the tables, had broken the bank on more than one occasion.

Bothwell smiled a cynical smile at the juxtaposition of those two names.

"I suppose the gentleman has forgotten his beating," he said to himself.

It was an infinite relief to him to know that Lady Valeria was on the other side of the Channel, that her pale face could not rise before him ghost-like amidst the home which she had ruined. He worked on with all the better will at that embryo home of his for the knowledge that this dreaded siren was far away—worked with such energy that the builders were whipped out of their customary jog-trot, and laid bricks as bricks were never laid before. Bothwell watched every brick, with a three-foot rule in his hand, and pointed out every flaw in the setting. He paid his builder promptly, as the work progressed, and gave him every encouragement to be speedy.

The alterations and improvements in the old cottage were all completed by the end of November, and the builders had finished the brickwork of the new

rooms. The old rooms were thoroughly dry and ready for occupation before Christmas; and Bothwell spent his Christmas in his own house, the first Christmas he had so spent, and a very dismal one. But he had his dog, a devoted collie, the gift of Dora Wyllard; he had his pipe and his books; and he made the best of his solitude. He had a couple of lads—his first pupils—coming to him early in January, and he wanted to air the house in his own person. He was a little proud of this first house of his own, even in the midst of his sadness, as every man is proud of the thing that he has created. He walked about the rooms, opening and shutting doors and window-sashes, to see how they worked. Needless to say that some of them did not work at all, and that he had various interviews with foremen and carpenters, by whom a good deal of tinkering had to be done before everything was ship-shape. That was Bothwell's favourite expression. He wanted things ship-shape. "He ought to call his house Ship-shape Hall," said the foreman.

Bothwell's chief delight was derived from his own little inventions and contrivances, his shelves in

odd corners, his pegs and hooks, and ingenious little cupboards. These he gazed upon and examined daily in silent rapture. When his two boys came to him—long-legged brawny youths, with open countenances, grinning perpetually for very shyness—he took them to see all the shelves and hooks, and expounded his theories in relation to those conveniences. There was not to be a slovenly corner in the house; every article was to have its peg or hook, or shelf or cupboard. Tennis-balls, rackets, foils, single-sticks, skates, whips, guns, boots, caps, and gloves. Everything was to be classified, departmented. Organisation was to be the leading note.

Before a week was over, the boys had begun to adore Bothwell. They were sporting, and could afford to keep horses; and Bothwell and they hunted with foxhounds and harriers all through that long winter, far into the gladness of spring. The boys were always with their tutor. He had no leisure in which to abandon himself to sadness; except when he shut himself up in his study to write to his cousin Dora, who was living in Florence, attended by the faithful Priscilla, who hated Italy as the

stronghold of the Scarlet Lady, and by Stodden, the old Penmorval butler. Julian Wyllard's widow was living in absolute retirement, broken-hearted, seeing no one, seen by no one. The society papers had nothing to say about *her*.

From Bothwell, Heathcote sometimes heard of her, heard of her with an aching heart. No message of friendship, no line of recognition had there ever been for him in any of those letters to Bothwell, of which he was generally told, some of which had been read to him.

Hilda had been quietly pursuing her studies at the Conservatoire all this time, seeing a good deal of Parisian life in a very modest way—that inner life of struggling artists and men of letters, and their homely industrious families, a life in which she found much that was intellectual, blended with a pleasant simplicity, an absence of all pretence. She liked the Tillet girls, and she liked her surroundings; while music, which had always been a passion with her, now became the sole object of her existence.

"I suppose you will come back to The Spaniards

some day, and take care of the twins and me," her brother said to her when they met for an hour in the August after Wyllard's death.

He had stopped in Paris to see Hilda, on his way to Switzerland.

"Yes, I shall go back to the old home—when Bothwell is married."

"That is rather hard lines for me, seeing that I don't believe Bothwell has any idea of getting married to any one except you."

Hilda blushed, and then shook her head despondingly.

"Who can tell what he means to do?" she said. "General Harborough died less than a year ago. Lady Valeria could scarcely marry within the year."

"But if Bothwell meant to marry Lady Valeria, he would scarcely be grinding lads at Trevena," answered Heathcote. "He has behaved so well that I feel it my duty to plead for him."

Hilda put her arms round her brother's neck and kissed him, by way of answer.

"Let me finish my studies at the Conservatoire; and then, at the beginning of next winter, I will go

back to The Spaniards, if you still want me there. But perhaps you will have found another mistress for the old house before that time."

"I know what you mean, Hilda," he answered gravely. "No, there is no hope of that."

"Not yet, perhaps. It is too soon. Dora is too loyal and true to forget easily. But the day will come when her heart will turn to her first love. You have never ceased to care for her, have you, Edward?"

"No, dear; such a love as mine means once, and once only. My wife was all goodness, and I was grateful to her, and fond of her—but that affection was not like the old love, and it never extinguished the old love."

"Be sure your reward will come in due time."

"I can afford to wait."

He went on to Switzerland, and from Switzerland strayed into Italy, the St. Gotha route inviting him. He spent a month at Florence, and he saw Dora Wyllard several times during that period, for half an hour at a time. She had taken up her abode for the summer at an hotel—near the Abbey of the

Gray Monks, in the forest of Vallombrosa, a truly romantic spot amidst wooded hills. Hither Edward Heathcote made his pilgrimage, deeming himself richly rewarded by half an hour's interview; but there was little in those interviews to stimulate hope. The widow was bowed down by the burden of her sorrow. Her only feeling in relation to Edward Heathcote was that he alone upon earth knew the story of her husband's life, and that he alone could fully sympathise with her in her hopeless misery.

There are widows and widows. While Dora Wyllard was living alone among the pines and chestnuts of the Apennines, seeing no one but monks and occasional tourists, and religiously avoiding the latter, Lady Valeria Harborough was living up the Thames, in a neighbourhood which has of late become so fashionable that it now ranks rather as an annexe to West-End-London than as the country.

General Harborough's widow had hired one of the prettiest villas at Marlow, a dainty bungalow,

built by an artist, who soon tired of his toy, and exchanged the villa for a house-boat, which was less commodious and a good deal more unhealthy, but which possessed the charm of not being rooted in the soil. The house had seemed perfect when Lady Valeria took it, but she had sent down a West End upholsterer with a keen eye for the beautiful to make all possible improvements; and the result was a nest which might have satisfied a modern Cleopatra. But it did not quite satisfy Lady Valeria, who found fault with a good many things, and informed the upholsterer that although his taste was fairly good, and his colouring well chosen, there was an absence of originality in his work.

"I have seen other houses almost as pretty," she said, "and I have seen drawing-rooms just like this, which is worse. I hate to live in rooms like other people's."

The upholsterer murmured something about a royal princess and a royal duchess, both of whom had condescended to express themselves pleased at his decoration of their houses; but Lady Valeria froze him with her look of scorn.

"I hope you don't compare me with royal princesses," she said contemptuously. "They are accustomed to let other people think for them, poor creatures, and they take anything they can get. No one expects originality in a palace. I don't wish to grumble, Mr. Sherrendale, but I am just a little disappointed in your work. It has no *cachet*."

The upholsterer accepted his rebuke meekly, but with an air of being wounded to the quick; and he took care to debit his wounded feelings against Lady Valeria when he made out his bill.

That villa up the river in the lovely June and July weather seemed to be in the midst of the world's fair. It was gayer than Park Lane—a more concentrated gaiety. Pleasure wore her zone a little looser here than in London. There was just a touch of Bohemianism. People dressed as they liked, said what they liked, did as they liked. There were few stately entertainments, few formal dinners, or smart dances; but every one kept open house; there was a perpetual dropping in, or going and coming, which kept car-

riages and horses at work all day between houses and stations. The river was like a high-road, and half the population lived in white flannel, and smart tennis frocks, and eccentric hats. It was a world apart—a bright glad summer world in which there was no such thing as thought or care; a world of shining blue water and green meadows, dipping willows, rushy eyots, and hanging woods; a world in which there were hardly any regular meals, only a perpetual picnic, the popping of champagne corks heard in every creek and backwater, while humbler revellers rested on their oars to drink deep of shandygaff; a world musical every evening with glees, and songs, and serenades, to an accompaniment of feathering oars.

In such a world as this Lady Valeria Harborough lived over again the same kind of life she had lived at Simla—but not quite the same; for at Simla she had maintained her dignity as General Harborough's wife; she had received the worship of her admirers as a queen in the old days of chivalry might receive the homage of true knights. Now she had a

different air; and the homage that was offered was of a different quality. That winter of widowhood at Monaco, with her staunch ally Sir George Varney in constant attendance upon her, had made a curious change in Lady Valeria. It had vulgarised her with that gratuitous vulgarity which has become of late years one of the leading notes in English society — the affectation of clipped words and slang phrases, the choice of vulgar ideas, the studious cultivation of vulgar manners. Naturally this acquired vulgarity of Mayfair is not quite the same as that of Brixton or Highbury. There is not the genuine ring about it. The accent is the accent of Patricia, but the words are the words of Plebeia. It is, however, all the more offensive because of that blending of aristocratic insolence—that Pall Mall swagger which gives *ton* to the idioms of Hoxton and Holloway.

Lady Valeria had fallen into the fashionable slang and the current drivel. She had left off reading, and had taken to cigarettes. Her court was less of a court than of old, and more of a smoke-room. People came and went, and did and

said what they liked in her presence. Sometimes in the dreamy noontide, when the closed venetians and the shadowy rooms recalled the atmosphere of Simla, Lady Valeria reclined in her lounging chair, fanning herself languidly, and half stupefied with chloral, a state which she described as being "a little low." Sometimes in the evening she was all fire and sparkle, a vivacity which her enemies attributed to dry champagne. There was a great deal of champagne consumed at that ideal villa, but with a perpetual dropping in of visitors—a household conducted upon the laxest principles—who could tell what became of the wine? The empty bottles were the only difficulty, since there seems to be no use yet invented for empty champagne bottles; the very outcasts, the rag and bone collectors, reject them.

Lady Valeria was going to the bad. That was the general opinion among her nearest and dearest —the people who ate her dinners and drank her wine, and smoked her cigarettes, and used her luxurious rooms as if the villa had been a club. She had taken a horror of solitude, must have a

crowd about her always, be amused, cost what it might; and as she hated her own family she would have none of them at any price. Hence the somewhat rowdy following which made the house by the river notorious; known by those lighted windows which shone late into the small hours, when all other casements were dark; known by the sound of strident laughter and the rattle of dice.

Lady Valeria had been ruined by a winter at Monaco. That was what some people said. Others ascribed her deterioration to the fact of having escaped all control, and having too much money at her disposal. Others shook their heads, and asked what could be expected of any woman whose guide, philosopher, and friend was George Varney.

"And he means to be her husband," added one shrewd observer.

"My dear Aubrey, she detests him," urged another.

"That makes no difference. He means to marry her. A woman who takes chloral will marry any man who makes up his mind to have her."

CHAPTER XIII.

"HOW LIKE A WINTER HATH THY ABSENCE BEEN."

PERHAPS, among all Valeria's friends and admirers, Sir George Varney was the only man who had any inkling of the truth, who was keen enough to discover the real cause of that moral decay which in its results was obvious to every one. He had enjoyed more of Lady Valeria's confidence than anybody else, and he had watched her closely, both before and after her husband's death. She had tried to keep him at a distance when they first met at Monaco; she had let him see that her resentment was as strong as ever; but at a race-meeting in the neighbourhood he had contrived to make his peace with her. The gambler's common instinct drew them together. She was alone in a strange land—or in other words, she knew no one except Sir George Varney whose counsel upon turf questions was worth sixpence; and she humiliated herself, and forgot that burning

wrong of the past, tried to forget that for her sake her dead husband had beaten this man. She allowed Sir George to call upon her one February afternoon, and tell her all about his book for the Craven and the First Spring, across the dainty Moorish tea-tray, with its little brazen tea-pot, and eggshell cups and saucers. After that they became staunch allies, if not staunch friends. Valeria had now the command of ample funds, and could bet as much as she liked. When she took Sir George's advice she was generally a winner. She invariably lost when she followed her own inclinations. He initiated her as to the mysteries of the tables at Monte Carlo, expounded the whole theory of martingales, and showed her how she might beguile the tedium of her days with the occult science of chance, as exemplified by pricking rows of figures on a card.

They were a great deal together as the season wore on, and, as a natural consequence, they were talked about a great deal by that section of society whose chief conversation is of the follies and sins of its own particular set.

Sir George felt that he was getting on; but in

his heart of hearts he knew perfectly well that Valeria did not care a straw for him, and that she was never likely to care for him. He knew that she had passionately loved Bothwell Grahame, and that despair at his abandonment was the mainspring of all her conduct. She was reckless of herself and of her good name—spent her money like water—ruined her health—indulged every caprice of the moment—gave way to every fit of ill-temper—simply because, having lost Bothwell Grahame, she had nothing in life worth living for, except such things as could give her feverish excitement, and with that excitement forgetfulness.

Knowing all this, knowing that the woman's heart was like an empty sepulchre, George Varney was not the less determined to win her for his wife.

"We suit each other so well," he said modestly, when his friends congratulated him, considerably in advance, after their manner. "No, we are not engaged. I only wish we were; but I daresay, if I am good, it may run to that by and by. She is a very fine woman, and has a remarkable head for the turf—remarkable, by Jove! She's always wrong;

but the mind is there, don't you know, a very remarkable mind. And she's a very fair judge of a horse, too, or would be if she would only look at his legs, which she never does."

"And she has plenty of lucre, eh, George? I think that's the main point in your case, isn't it?"

"Very sorry for myself, but can't do without the filthy lucre. Couldn't afford to elope with Mrs. Menelaus, if she was a pauper," answered Sir George, with cheery frankness.

"Some idiot told me that her husband knocked you down at the last party they ever gave at Fox Hill," said his friend, with a half grin; "that was a lie, of course."

"No, there is some truth—we had a little passage at fisticuffs: and that's why I mean to marry his widow," answered Sir George savagely. "I meant to have the law of him; but as he bilked the beak by dying before the hearing of the summons, I mean to have his money by way of consolation. It will be a pleasanter remedy."

"And the lady thrown in by way of make-weight," grinned his friend.

The time came when Sir George thought he might venture to advance his claim, in a purely business-like manner. Lady Valeria and he had made a splendid book for the Derby, and the lady had won something over five thousand pounds, graphically described by her coadjutor as a pot of money. The money was of very little consequence to her nowadays, for she had not yet succeeded in living beyond her income; but she was as eager to win as she had been in the old time at Simla when losing meant difficulty, and might mean ruin. She loved the sensation of success, the knowledge that her horse had struggled to the front and kept there at the crucial moment.

Emboldened by this brilliant *coup*, Sir George reminded Valeria of his patience and devotion, and asked her to accept him as her second husband.

"I don't expect you to marry me just yet," he said. "It's only six months since the General died —and I know women are sticklers for etiquette in these matters, though they are leaving off widow's caps, and a good deal of humbug. But I should like

to have your word for the future. I don't want another fellow to cut in and win the cup after I've made all the running."

Lady Valeria looked at him in a leisurely way with that contemptuous smile of hers, a smile that had crushed so many a gallant admirer.

"I thought we understood each other too well for this kind of thing to happen," she said, with perfect good temper and placidity. "We have been getting on remarkably well together—and I have even taught myself to forget your impertinence that night at Fox Hill. As to marriage, you may be almost sure of one thing, and quite sure of another —first, that I shall never marry at all; secondly, that I shall never marry you."

Sir George bowed, and said not another word. The partnership on the turf and at baccarat was too profitable to be imperilled. But he meant the alliance to become closer and more binding, before he and Lady Valeria had done with each other.

And now in this lovely July weather, when the river and the woods were at their fairest, Sir George Varney felt himself several furlongs nearer the w

ning-post than he had been at Monaco. Lady Valeria had become a more sensitive creature of late. The strings of the lyre were played upon more easily. In other words, Valeria had taken to chloral. Sir George was on excellent terms with her maid, and had received information of a character which he himself called "the straight tip" from that astute damsel. Lady Valeria had her good days and her bad days; and on the bad days she was sunk in an abyss of despair, from which not even some great success in her racing speculations could rouse her. It was in one of these fits of despondency that Sir George Varney made his second proposal of marriage. But this time he did not sue as her slave, nor did he adopt the calm and *débonnaire* tone of a business man advocating an advantageous alliance. He approached her with a brutal energy, a coarse plainness of speech, which shocked the shattered nerves, and frightened her into submission.

He told her the scandals that were rife about her—told her how, if she did not rehabilitate her character by becoming his wife, she would find her-

self cut by society as his mistress—laughed at her half-indignant, half-hysterical protest—told her that the world was much too wicked to believe in any innocent alliance between a beautiful woman and a man of forty, whose past life had not been stainless; talked to her as no man had ever dared to talk to her until that hour—talked till she sat trembling before him, vanquished, subjugated by the strangeness of sheer brutality, she who a year ago had been sheltered and defended from slander and insult by the protecting love of a noble heart.

She sat cowering before him. Was the world so vile as to suspect her—and of caring for this man, whom she loathed? She covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

"There is no one upon earth who would stir a foot to protect me against their vile slanders; not one of my own kin who would stand up for me," she sobbed.

"How could you expect it," asked Sir George, "when you have kept all your people at arm's length? You may lay long odds not one of *that* lot will take our part. I would give some of your traducers a

sound horsewhipping to-morrow, but that would do you more harm than good, unless you mean to marry me."

"Horsewhip them, and I *will* marry you," cried Valeria, rising and rushing from the room, tremulous with rage.

Upon this hint Sir George promptly acted. He took an early opportunity of leading on a harmless youth to say something uncivil of Lady Valeria, and thereupon chastised him in his flannels before a select audience. The scapegoat writhed under the strong gut riding-whip, could not understand why he was so castigated, vowed vengeance, and sent a friend to Sir George that evening, proposing an early meeting on the sands near Ostend; at which message Sir George openly laughed.

"When boys are rude they must be punished," he said, "but I don't shoot boys. Tell your young friend I am sorry I lost my temper; and that if he will write a nice little letter, apologising to my future wife for his rashness of speech, I shall consider we are quits."

It was known next day along both banks of the river that Lady Valeria was to marry Sir George Varney immediately on the expiry of her mourning. The *Daily Telegraph* possessed itself of the fact before the *Morning Post*, and it was recorded in all the society papers of the following week. Bothwell Grahame read of it a week later in the *United Service Gazette*, read and was thankful; for now this restless spirit, which had wrought him so much evil, would be exorcised and bound for ever in the thrall of matrimony.

"I am sorry she is to marry a scoundrel," he said to himself; "otherwise my feeling would be unalloyed gladness."

And now Bothwell dared to hope that the wandering bird Hilda might be lured home to her nest —now that doubting heart might have faith once more.

If he could but write to her, tell her of Valeria's engagement, ask her if he had not proved himself faithful, if she could not trust him henceforward with perfect trustfulness! She had believed in him when his fellow-men pointed at him as a suspected mur-

derer ; she had fled from him because an audacious woman claimed him for her lover. Strange inconsistency of a woman's heart, so strong and yet so weak !

Heathcote was in Italy, and Heathcote was the only channel of communication between Bothwell and his lost love. He saddled Glencoe and rode over to The Spaniards, where he hoped to hear of Heathcote's speedy return ; but the Fräulein was quite in the dark as to her employer's movements. He wrote very seldom ; he left everything in her hands. She had received a little note from Florence nearly a fortnight ago. He had written not one word as to the probable time of his return.

Bothwell talked about Hilda, and insidiously questioned the Fräulein, who might perchance know the girl's whereabouts. But Miss Meyerstein was quite as dark upon the subject as Greek society in general was about the adventures of Ariadne. All Miss Meyerstein could tell Bothwell was that Hilda had Glossop with her, which preference of Glossop the mild Fräulein evidently regarded as something in the way of a slight to herself.

"If Glossop can be trusted to know where Hilda is, I think I might have been trusted," she said.

"I wonder a frivolous person like Glossop has not told the secret to half Bodmin before now," said Bothwell.

He wrote to Hilda that night, enclosing his letter to Heathcote at Florence. It seemed a wearily roundabout way of reaching Hilda, who might be in Scotland or in Scandinavia for all he knew; but it was his only way, and it was just possible that she might be with her brother, and receive his letter sooner than he dared hope. He wrote a few lines to Heathcote with the enclosure, telling him about Lady Valeria's engagement. "I suppose when they two are married our banns may be put up in Bodmin Church," he wrote; "unless Hilda has any other objection to me."

He counted the days, the hours almost, while he waited for a reply to his letter. He followed the letter in its journey, now over sea, and then over land—halted with it at Calais, went southward with it, skirted the Mediterranean, pierced the Alps, and then it was all darkness. Who could tell

where the letter might have to go after it reached Florence?

"She may be hiding herself somewhere in England, and that wretched letter may have to travel all the way back again," he told himself ruefully.

He waited, and waited, and waited; bearing himself with a brave front before his pupils all the while, teaching them, botanising with them, boating, riding; shooting with them, and never once losing temper with them on account of his own trouble. But he was suffering an agony of impatience and suspense all the same, and one of the more thoughtful of his lads saw that he was paler than usual, and worn and haggard.

"You mustn't work with us if you are ill, Mr. Grahame," said the boy; "we'll get on with our work by ourselves for a bit."

"No, my dear boy, I'm not ill; I have not been sleeping very well lately—that's all. 'Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care.'"

"Yes, we can't get on without that beggar," answered the boy. "I know what it is to be awake all night with the toothache. I've often wondered

that the nights should be so jolly short when one's asleep, and so jolly long when one's awake."

At breakfast a few days later one of the lads, the son of a brother officer of Bothwell's, looked up from the *Evening Standard* with an exclamation of surprise.

"Here's the widow of one of your old friends gone and got married, Mr. Grahame," he said. "'At Galbraith Church, N.B., Sir George Varney, Bart., of the Hop Poles, Maidstone, to Lady Valeria Harborough, of Galbraith Castle, Perthshire, and Fox Hill, Plymouth.' You saved the old General's life up at the hills, didn't you?" asked the boy. "I've heard my father talk about it."

"It wasn't worth talking about, Hector," answered Bothwell. "The General was a good friend to me, and I honour his memory."

"More than Lady Valeria does, or she wouldn't marry such a cad as Varney. I've heard my father say he is a cad."

"It is safer not to repeat opinions of that kind," said Bothwell.

He tried to play the schoolmaster while his heart

was beating furiously for very joy. She was married, that viper who had so well-nigh spoiled his life; she was married to a scoundrel who would make her life miserable, and he, Bothwell, was his own man again. Hilda could have no further justification for distrust. He had held himself aloof from the siren, he had demonstrated by his conduct that he had no hankering after her or her fortune; and now that she was safely disposed of in second wedlock, Hilda could have no excuse for delaying his happiness.

All things had gone well with him, except this one thing. He had built and furnished his house, and laid out his garden; people were full of praises for his taste and cleverness. He had been lucky with his pupils, and he liked his work. He was able to save money, and before the year was out he had laid aside the first hundred pounds towards the extinction of his debt to his cousin. But Dora did not want the debt extinguished, and had written him an indignant letter when he offered to pay the money into her banking account.

"How dare you pinch and scrape in order to pay me off?" she wrote. "How do I know that you

are not half-starving those poor lads, in your desire to get out of my debt? It is your paltry pride which rebels at an obligation even to your adopted sister."

To atone for the harshness of her letter she sent him an old Florentine cabinet of ebony and ivory, a gem which glorified his drawing-room, already enriched by her gifts; for she had sent him bronzes from one place, and pottery from another, and glass from a third. She had made up her mind that when the time came for Bothwell to lead his young wife home, the home should be in some wise worthy of the wife.

And now there was an end of all uncertainties about that first unhappy entanglement of Bothwell's; and nothing but caprice need keep him and Hilda apart any longer.

A fortnight had gone since he had written to Hilda, and there had been no sign. It was the fifth day after the announcement of Lady Valeria's marriage in the London papers, and Bothwell started once more upon that long ride by moorland and lane, across country from Trevena to Bodmin, and thence to The Spaniards. He expected the smallest

comfort at the end of his journey; only a little talk with the Fräulein, who might have had a recent letter from Heathcote, and might be able to tell him something, were it ever so little. She was always friendly and compassionate; and she was always ready to talk to him about Hilda, and that was much. On one occasion she had gone so far as to take him into Hilda's private sitting-room, and let him gloat over the rows of prettily-bound books—Tennyson and Browning, and Dickens and Thackeray—and the little tables, and manifold nicknacks, the mantelpiece border which those dear hands had worked. There stood his own photograph, framed and curtained with plush, as if it were too sacred for the common eye. He had given her a smaller copy of the same photograph, and he hoped that she had taken that with her, that she looked at it sometimes, among strange faces.

Miss Meyerstein expatiated on Hilda's abrupt departure, and the little luggage with which she had provided herself.

"Only her dressing-bag and a small portmanteau," said the Fräulein. "She left all her pretty

frocks hanging in the wardrobe; all her laces and ribbons, and gloves and ornaments in her drawers. She must have had to buy everything new. And there is her wedding-gown, just as it came from the dressmaker's the day after she left home."

And then, at Bothwell's urgent, reiterated entreaty, Miss Meyerstein went into the adjoining room, and came back, after a rattling of keys, bringing with her a white object which looked like the sheeted dead being carried away from a plague-stricken house.

It was only Hilda's wedding-gown, wrapped in voluminous coverings of white linen.

Miss Meyerstein flung off the coverings, and shook out the white satin gown, satin of so rich a fabric that it took all manner of pearly and opal hues in the autumn light—a smart little frock, with a round skirt, and just one big puff at the back of the waist, like a carelessly-tied sash.

"Short, for dancing," said Miss Meyerstein, as she held out the frock at arm's length, dangling in the air.

"But she didn't expect to dance upon her wedding-day!" ejaculated Bothwell stupidly.

"No, but afterwards. She would go to dances, and she would be expected to appear as a bride."

"Of course," muttered Bothwell, wondering how many dances—save the dances of pixies in a moonlit glen—might be expected to occur within easy reach of Trevena.

He knelt and kissed the hem of the white satin frock, and then turned away with a sigh that was almost a sob.

"Not a grain of dust has got to it," said Miss Meyerstein. "It will be ready when it is wanted."

"Yes," answered Bothwell. "The gown will be ready when it is wanted; but who can tell who the bridegroom will be?"

"He will be nobody if he is not you," said Miss Meyerstein. "That poor child positively adores you."

"How do you know? It is nearly a year since you saw her."

"Such love as that does not wear itself out in a year."

To-day Bothwell felt that he wanted even such poor comfort as might be had from feminine twaddle

of this kind. He felt that even a romp with the twins would do him good. They were of her race, and she had loved them, and they could prattle to him about her.

It was a rainy afternoon late in October, a dreary day for that long ride over the hills. The Atlantic yonder had a look of unspeakable melancholy; a great gray sea into which gray earth and sky melted. It would be dark before Bothwell could get back to Trevena, and the ride was not the pleasantest after nightfall; but a man who had ridden through Afghan passes in his time was not to be scared by dark hills and narrow lanes. Bothwell was in a mood to ride somewhere, were it only in the hope of riding away from his own impatient thoughts. He had delayed starting till after luncheon, having waited to give his boys the full benefit of a long morning's work. It was between five and six when he came to the iron gates of The Spaniards, and the sun was setting behind the hills yonder above Penmorval, poor deserted Penmorval, where the pictured faces looked out upon empty floors, and where the housekeeper sighed as

she went from room to room, attending to fires that warmed desolate hearths.

The Spaniards looked a little more cheerful than when Bothwell had seen it last, for there were lights in many of the lower windows, and those lamp-lit casements glowed brightly across the rainy dusk. He would be able to get a good cup of tea from the Fräulein, and to put up his horse for an hour or two before he turned homewards again.

An empty carriage passed him in the drive, and turned towards an opening in the shrubbery that led to the stable-yard. There were visitors at The Spaniards, upon that wet evening! Bothwell wondered who the guest, or guests, could be, in the absence of the master.

Or was it the master himself who had come back? His heart beat faster at the thought. He dismounted and rang the bell. The door was opened directly. There were a couple of servants in the hall and some luggage. Yes, the master of the house had returned.

"Take my horse to the stables, like a good fellow," said Bothwell to the man who had opened

the door. "Your master has come home, I see."

"Yes, sir, ten minutes ago."

Bothwell waited to ask no further questions, did not wait to be announced even, but walked straight to the library, Heathcote's usual sitting-room, opened the door, and went in.

There was no lamp. The room was lighted only by the fire-glow, which gleamed on bookshelves and old oak panelling, and on the massive timbers of the ceiling. There was a tea-table in front of the wide old fireplace—one of those vagabond tea-tables which can make themselves at home anywhere—and the tea was being poured out by a girl who wore a neat little black velvet toque and dark cloth jacket, a girl who looked as if she had just come off a journey, while Heathcote reposed in his armchair on the other side of the hearth.

No one but Hilda could have been so much at her ease in that room, which was in some wise a sacred chamber, especially reserved for the master of the house. No one but Hilda had such pretty hair, or such a graceful bend of the head. The girl

in the velvet toque was sitting with her back to Bothwell; but he had not a moment's doubt as to her identity.

He went over to the hearth, gave his hand to Heathcote silently, and then seated himself by Hilda's side, she looking up at him dumbly the while, half in fear.

"What have you to say to me, Hilda, after having used me so ill?" he asked, taking her hand in his.

"Only that it was for your own sake I went away on the eve of our marriage," she answered seriously. "I did not want to stand between you and happiness."

"Would it not have been wiser, and fairer to me, if you had taken my views upon the matter before you ran away?"

"You would have been too generous to tell me the truth; you would have sacrificed yourself to your sense of honour. How could I tell you did not love Lady Valeria better than me?"

"If you had read *Tom Jones* you would have had a very easy way of solving that question. You

would have had only to look in the glass, and there you would have seen, as Sophia Western saw, the reason for a lover's devotion. You would have seen purity and innocence, and fresh young beauty; and you would have known that your lover could not falter in his truth to you."

"I don't think Tom's conduct was altogether blameless, in spite of the looking-glass, eh, Bothwell?" said Heathcote, laughing at him. It is so hard to have to make love before a third person. "You have to thank me for bringing home your sweetheart. I read the advertisement of Lady Valeria's marriage at Genoa three days ago, as I was on my way home; so I stopped in Paris, and brought this young lady away from her musical studies at an hour's notice. I suppose she was getting tired of the Conservatoire, for she seemed uncommonly glad to come."

"And you were in Paris?" cried Bothwell. "So near! If I had only known!"

"There would have been nothing gained by following her," said Heathcote. "I never met with a more resolute young woman than this sister of

mine. When she was determined to have you, there was not the least use in opposing her, and when she had made up her mind not to have you, she was just as inflexible. But now that Lady Valeria has taken to herself a second husband, and that you seem to bear the blow pretty cheerfully, perhaps Hilda may be inclined to change her mind for the second time."

"Her wedding-gown is hanging in her wardrobe ready for her," said Bothwell, drawing a little closer to his truant sweetheart, in the sheltering dusk, that delicious hour for true and loving hearts, blind-man's holiday, betwixt dog and wolf.

"How did you know that?" asked Heathcote.

"The Fräulein told me. She has been taking care of your wedding-gown, Hilda. She knew that it would be wanted. You had better wear it as soon as possible, dearest. It is a year old already; and it is going more and more out of fashion every day."

"She shall wear it before we are a month older," said Heathcote. "I have had too much trouble about this marriage already; and I'll stand no more shilly-shallying. We'll put up the banns next

Sunday; and in less than a month from to-day you two foolish people shall be one."

Edward Heathcote kept his word, and the smart white satin frock was worn one bright morning in November, worn by the prettiest bride that had been seen in Bodmin Church for many a year, the townspeople said—those townspeople who had now only praises and friendliest greetings for Bothwell Grahame, albeit a year ago he had seemed to them as a possible murderer.

A telegram had informed Dora Wyllard of the wedding-day, so soon as ever the date had been fixed, but she had not responded, as Hilda and her brother had hoped she would respond, to the invitation to be present at the wedding. She could not bear to see the Cornish hills yet awhile, she told Hilda, in her letter of congratulation. Years must pass, in all probability, before she could endure to look upon that familiar landscape again, or to see that roof-tree which had sheltered her when she was Julian Wyllard's happy wife.

"I am rejoiced to know that you and Bothwell have come to a safe haven at last," she wrote. "I

shall always be interested in hearing of your welfare, cheered and comforted by the thought of your bright home. I cannot blame you for having made Bothwell wait for his happiness, Hilda; for I feel that you have acted wisely in making sure of his free choice. There can now be no after-thought, no lurking suspicion to come between you and your wedded love.

"For my own part I am at peace here, and that is much. I read a great deal, paint a little every day; and my picture, however bad it may be, is a kind of companion to me, a thing that seems to live as it grows under my hand. My models interest me, and through them I have become acquainted with several humble households in Florence, and find a great deal to interest me in this warm-hearted, hot-headed race. Best of all, I am away from old scenes, old associations; and sometimes, sitting dreaming in my sunny balcony, with the blue waters of the Arno gliding past under my feet, I almost believe that I am some new creature without a history, and not that Dora Wyllard who was once mistress of Penmorval.

"I wish you and Bothwell would take your honeymoon holiday in the South, and spend a week or two here with me. There is plenty of accommodation for you in these grand old apartments of mine—a first-floor of a dozen rooms, all large and lofty. My old servants keep everything in exquisite order, and are devoted in their attention to me.

"It was a pleasure to me to see your brother when he was staying in Florence. Tell him that I left Vallombrosa only a week ago, and was very sorry to come away from wood and mountain even then."

Hilda and her husband accepted this friendly invitation, and spent half their honeymoon on the road to Florence, and the other half in that picturesque city. They found Dora the shadow of her former self. She had a gentle air of resignation, a pensive placidity which was inexpressibly touching. She never mentioned her dead husband. She was full of thoughtfulness for others, and had made herself the adored benefactress of a little colony of poor Florentines. She had furnished her rooms

and established herself in a manner which indicated the intention to make a permanent home in the city; and here Bothwell and his wife left her, with deep regret.

"Will you never come back to Cornwall, Dora?" Hilda asked piteously, in the last farewell moments at the railway-station.

"Never is a long word, dearest. I suppose I shall see the old places again some day; but I must be a good deal older than I am now—a good deal further away from my old sorrows."

Dora spoke without reckoning upon that Providence which shapes our ends in spite of us; and happily for the cause of true love, Providence found a way of bringing Dora Wyllard back to Cornwall much sooner than she had intended to return.

A little more than a year after Bothwell and his wife left Florence, the happy home at Trevena was darkened by the shadow of an awful fear. A son had been born to Bothwell Grahame; and before the boy was a week old the young mother was in imminent danger of death. Edward Heathcote was in Italy, spending his autumn holiday, going

over much of the same ground that he had visited before, and loitering longer and later than the previous year. A telegram from Bothwell told him of his sister's peril; and another telegram reached Mrs. Wyllard from the same source. Moved by the same impulse, Dora and Heathcote met at the station, each on the same errand, bent on starting by the first train for Paris. They travelled together in sad and silent companionship, each oppressed by the fear of a great calamity.

Heathcote had telegraphed before he started, asking for a telegram to meet him at the Paris station, and here the message brought a ray of comfort.

"A little better. The doctors are more hopeful."

Anxious days and nights followed Dora's arrival at Trevena. Poor Bothwell suffered a suppressed agony of grief, which seemed to have aged him at least ten years by the time the crisis was past, and the young mother was able to smile upon her first-born. Happily these markings of care are soon erased from youthful faces; and before Christmas

Bothwell was himself again, and ready to receive a new batch of pupils, the old lot having been disposed of triumphantly in the summer before his son's birth.

Dora stayed in Cornwall during that winter of '83 and '84, and she is in Cornwall still, but not at Penmorval. She has established herself at her birth-place, Tregony Manor, near the Land's End; and here old friends and neighbours flock round her, the people who knew her mother, the friends of her childish days, of her happy girlhood. They bring back sweet memories of the old time, and help to wean her from her gloomy thoughts.

One of her old companions, a spinster of thirty summers, is very often with her in the familiar home. They seem almost like the girl-friends of the past, painting together, playing, singing, working. All the old occupations have been resumed, as if the ten years intervening had hardly made any break in the two lives.

"Sometimes I fancy it is all a dream, and that you have never been away from Tregony," says Miss Beauchamp one morning when they are sitting at

work. "If we had but your dear good mother over there in her favourite chair by the fireplace, I should quite believe the last ten years to be only a dream. But she is gone, dear soul, and that makes a sad difference. Do you know, yesterday, when I looked out of the window and saw you and Mr. Heathcote walking on the terrace, I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was awake. You both looked exactly as you used to look ten years ago, when you were engaged."

Dora went on with her work in placid silence.

"Dora, he is so good, so loyal, so devoted to you," cried Miss Beauchamp, in her affectionate impulsive way. "You cannot be so cruel as to spoil his life for ever. Surely you will reward him some day."

"Some day," sang Dora softly, with her face bent low over her work: and her story ends thus with the refrain of a popular ballad.

THE END.

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